







THE
PRODIGAL'S PILGRIMAGE
INTO A FAR COUNTRY
AND
BACK TO HIS FATHER'S HOUSE.
IN FOURTEEN STAGES:

BY THOMAS JONES,
CURATE OF CREATON.

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

ISAIAH lv. 7.

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THE PRODIGAL'S PILGRIMAGE, OR, THE HISTORY OF THE LIFE OF THOMAS JONES, ESQ. A NOVEL IN FIVE VOLUMES. BY THOMAS JONES, ESQ. OF THE BAR AT LONDON. LONDON: PRINTED BY J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD, 1794.

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INTRODUCTION.

HUMAN actions have their *motives* ; and man, in all he does, should know his motives, and see that they are right in the sight of God and man. My end and motive in writing this small volume is, to teach plain men, in a plain manner, the way of salvation. For myself, I am satisfied that the parable of the Prodigal is the history of man in his departure from God, and his returning to God again. It would be difficult to put any other construction upon it. The reader may here learn what sin has done, and what grace can do. Sin separates man from God ; leads him astray into rebellion against heaven, and then sinks him into ruin and misery.—Grace restores the sinner to God, and conducts him back to his Father's house, and reinstates him in his forfeited privileges.

This little work is designed chiefly for the use of the poor of *my own flock*, which has been under my care just *forty years* in the wilderness. Having now arrived near the banks of Jordan, I wish to leave some testimony of my regard and concern for the welfare of a people, among whom I have had my full share of indulgence and enjoyment. Few stipendiary Curates

have continued so long with one people, or enjoyed such uninterrupted peace and kindness, love and harmony, as have happily fallen to my lot. I beg their acceptance of this small token of my gratitude, as an expression of my concern for their future welfare. It teaches them nothing new, but it may call to their remembrance some of the doctrines which they have heard for so many years. In the review of which, we find cause to praise God aloud for the many happy sabbaths we have spent together in the courts of the Lord; while we have at the same time cause to lament our own unfruitfulness, and slow progress in the way everlasting. In order to stand fast in the faith and go forward, let us keep our eyes fixed on the land of endless rest, "and press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." That our hearts may be allured heaven-wards, let us keep in constant view the forgiving temper and loving kindness of the Eternal Father towards returning sinners, who throw themselves on his mercy and grace. May we return to our God, and abide with him, that we may finally ascend to the heavens, and be for ever with the Lord.

THE
PRODIGAL'S PILGRIMAGE.

I.—THE ARROGANT CLAIM.

Luke, chap. xv. ver. 12.—*Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.*

THIS parable of our Lord is perhaps of all others the most interesting and instructive. It is in fact the whole history of man from beginning to end : of every man that returns to God, and finds the way to heaven. And what is the history of man, especially of those that are eternally saved, but a long catalogue of the most extraordinary events : an endless train of mysteries, which rise in wonder as God proceeds with his plan of salvation.

Of all the beings which God has brought into existence, man is the most singular and extraordinary, whether we consider him in his *origin*, as he came from the hands of his Maker, or in his *progress* through one

world into another, or in his final *destination* and eternal state.

1. What was man's *origin*? and how was he formed? God made great preparation for man before he gave him existence. He made the heavens and the earth for the use of man: built this lower creation for his dwelling place, and furnished it with all manner of store. When creation was finished, arranged, and beautified, man was brought into existence. And the manner of his creation should never be forgotten. "God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him;" Gen. i. 27. And on the day that he made his appearance, he was constituted Lord of this lower world. His great Creator said unto him, "Have thou dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth," Gen. i. 28. Such was man in his origin.

2. And what is the history of man's *progress* through one world into another: or his journey through this life? He soon departed from his God. And when he lost God, he lost all: lost the image and favour of his God: lost his dominion over the creatures: nay, lost his life. In the day he sinned, in that day he died to God, and turned to be his enemy, and rebelled against him. And how can evil proceed farther!

This tremendous apostacy of man made way for the *grand Redemption* of the fallen world by the death and sufferings of the Son of God. God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, to be for salvation to the ends of the earth. The Son of God became the son of man, that the sons of men might be made the

sons of God. He put on the nature of man, which he will eternally wear in his kingdom; and in that nature suffered, bled, and died, that the children of men might be restored to God, obtain mercy, and live for ever.—“And as many as *received* him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God,” John i. 12. All that return to the Father in this new and living way, are constituted kings and priests unto God: and formed for an habitation of God through the spirit, and finally, are exalted to the throne of glory, to be for ever with the Lord. But all those that *reject* the Saviour, and neglect his great salvation, and refuse to return to the Father in this new and wondrous way of life, must perish everlastingly, and go where the worm dieth not, and where the fire is not quenched: for there is salvation in no other, but in him whose name is Jesus, and who died for our redemption.

3. What is man's *final destination*? He is a creature formed for eternity. As his origin was widely different from all other beings, so is his progressive history and his final destiny very different from them all. Truly marvellous are the things which man shall live to see. What he has yet seen are as nothing to what he shall see hereafter. He shall see the time when he shall change worlds, and find himself in the world of spirits disembodied. When he comes to the end of time and the beginning of eternity, he puts on immortality; and enters on a period that knows no end. Man shall live to see the whole creation pass away with tremendous thunders and disappear; when the elements shall melt with fervent heat: when earth and sea shall burn:

when sun and stars shall sink into endless darkness, and universal nature vanish out of sight, to give place to a new earth and a new heaven. Man shall live to see the Son of God coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, and with all the hosts of heaven in his train. Then shall the Arch-angel sound his trumpet to summon the living and the dead to come to judgment. The myriads of the dead shall come forth, "They that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation," John v. 29. Yes, man shall exist to witness the wonderful transactions of God's great day, when all the children of men shall appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive according "To what they have done in the body, whether it be good or evil." "The wicked shall go into everlasting punishment, but the righteous unto life eternal."

These scenes are yet before us, all of which man must live to see. When they are all over, and they will be over and gone by, man has still more and greater things to witness. Death, and the end of the world, the resurrection and the judgment, are scenes which are truly grand and great, yet are they all as nothing to what man has still before him. These are comparatively but little things which man passeth by as he is pursuing his journey to his eternal home, where immensity of wonders will be ever rising up to view, and increasing with the ages of eternity. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him," 1 Cor. ii. 9.

We have now sketched the history of man, and have taken a general view of his journey through the world of time into the world eternal. Let us now mark his conduct more narrowly.

I. He comes to his father to DEMAND HIS PORTION.

1. Man *must have a portion* to live upon, because he is a dependent being, and must live out of himself upon something else. God alone can live of and upon himself. All created beings are dependent beings, that derive their existence and borrow their support and their enjoyments. Let man be forsaken of God and be denied all supplies, and where is his happiness? He must therefore have his portion of goods for his support and comfort. He must have an inheritance to live upon for ever.

2. And a small portion will not suffice for man: his inheritance must be *truly great and lasting*, or he must continue poor and blind, naked and miserable.

The portion must be great, because the *powers* of the human soul are truly great. It has a capacity to possess and enjoy the greatest things. It can enjoy the highest felicity, even the exceeding great and eternal weight of glory. It has capacities which none can fill but God alone, and all that are made truly happy shall "be filled with all the fulness of God." And is not man also capable of suffering the deepest miseries, even the wrath of God and the torments of eternity?—Then the happiness or misery of man will turn upon the *choice* of his portion. "The wise shall inherit glory, but shame shall be the promotion of fools," Prov. iii. 35.

The *duration* of the soul's existence shews that his

portion and inheritance must be lasting as well as great. Man must live for ever : He had a beginning, shall have no end, but must live as long as God himself : his state beyond death is that of immortality. Solemn thought ! Can man, in passing through time to eternity forget that he is to live for ever ? And can man neglect to inquire what is to be his treasure and inheritance during his endless existence ? Are not we to exist for millions of ages far more numerous than the sand of the sea, or the particles of light in the sun beams ? then it must be a most necessary inquiry, what shall we have to subsist upon during such an endless period ? Nothing but the “ true and durable riches ” will answer our purpose. The portion must be fully adequate to the capacity and powers of the human soul, and durable as its existence, or there can be no felicity. Then let all men take heed to their choice of portion, for on this depends your happiness or misery, your triumphs or your torments, your joy or sorrow for ever and ever.

3. All men on earth *are choosing* their portion for another world. They have all sorts of treasures presented to their view. The treasures of earth and of heaven : the riches of the world and of Christ : things present and things to come : things temporal and things eternal, are all set before the children of men, for every one to make choice of his portion and inheritance. And every soul on earth does make his choice.

Go through all the *towns, cities, and kingdoms* of the world, visit all ranks, characters, and conditions, you will find them all busy, earnest, and intent upon something. Should you ask what they are all doing, the answer

must be, they are all choosing their portion, and laying up for time to come. Their choices are *various*: they are far enough from choosing the same things. The difference is very striking. One could hardly believe, that beings of the same order, endued with the same faculties, having the same concern and interest to mind, and placed alike under the same dispensation of mercy, should differ so widely in their choice of portion and inheritance.

4. Some make a very *foolish choice*: so extravagantly foolish, wicked, and injurious, as might fill us with astonishment. Were pearls and pebbles set before a man to take his choice, and were he to grasp eagerly at the common pebbles which are of no value, and with all indifference let go the pearls and jewels which are of the greatest worth, would you not esteem that man devoid of sense and reason? Heaven and earth are set before the children of men, and do not most men give a decided preference to the earth? They grasp eagerly at the things of time, and willingly lose the exceeding great and eternal weight of glory. How unaccountable is this conduct in rational beings! Yet we plainly see that thousands and millions give a decided preference to the paltry treasures of a fallen world, before the unsearchable riches of Christ, which are treasures for eternity. They choose to have their inheritance in a world where rust and moth do corrupt, rather than to have an incorruptible inheritance with the saints in light. What folly is practised by the deluded children of men in the choice of their treasure! they prefer to have in their hands for a few moments the map of a

small estate, rather than to possess a kingdom as their inheritance for ever. The *rich young man* in the gospel is a fair specimen of all worldly men. Christ said to him, sell thine earthly treasures, and divide them among the poor, and I will give thee far better treasures, and more durable riches in heaven. No, says he, I cannot part with my earthly things, though I lose heaven for ever. Is not this the language of every one that loves the world and the things that are in the world? God provided his *great supper*, his eternal salvation in Christ, and all sorts of perishing sinners are invited to partake of it. But multitudes refuse to come, and make their foolish excuses. They prefer their wives, their farms, their merchandise, to all the treasures of grace in Christ, yes, to all the rich provisions he hath made for the salvation of sinners, for ever.

How is it that men make such a foolish choice of portion?—The things of earth are *present* with them, they are “things which are seen;” they tempt the senses, and can be enjoyed now. Man is eager for enjoyment, and makes a great point of immediate possession, therefore grasps what is present with him. The inheritance in heaven can only be seen through faith, “and all men have not faith:” as it cannot be fully enjoyed till we go to another world, unbelievers care little about it, and are unwilling to wait; but cry with the sons of Eli, “Give it me now.”—Man that is departed from God, *naturally feeds on trash*, “on what is not bread,” “on the husks which the swine do eat;” and loathes the manna, the bread of life, which

came down from heaven. Having once forsaken God, we try to live without him. Sinners are idolaters, who love the creature more than the Creator : God complains aloud of this, and saith, " Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, for my people have committed two evils ; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water," Jer. ii. 12, 13. Fallen man has a strong *aversion to holy things*. " The carnal mind is enmity against God." The language of sinners to God is, " Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways," Job xxi. 14. The Gadarenes greatly valued their herds of swine ; but desired that Christ should depart out of their coast. The avaricious and profligate nation of Israel, said of the Saviour, " Away with him, crucify him ; " " we will not have this man to reign over us." Give us the earth, and we are satisfied to go without God's salvation.—These then are *some of the reasons* why men make such a foolish choice as to prefer earth to heaven, and the things which are seen and temporal, to the things which are not seen and eternal. They grasp at what is present with them : their hearts are for the earth, and against God.

The *folly* of their choice is seen here—they choose what is *not suitable* for the immortal mind. What relation is there between the human soul and the gold, the cattle, and the productions of the earth ? A living spirit and dead matter have no relation to each other. You might as well try to fill a barn with ideas, as to fill the soul of man with the things of the earth.—

Besides, the fulness of the world is not *sufficient* for the immortal mind: "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" The soul is capable of possessing and enjoying far greater and better things than all the world can give. God alone can fill the soul of man; and he only is a sufficient portion for it:—and the things of earth are not *durable* enough for the soul that is to live for ever. All things here are passing away, and will soon come to an end: but the soul must exist for endless ages. Where, *then*, is the portion of those that love the world and the things which are in the world, more than God who liveth for ever? It is well said, "Man walketh in a vain shadow and disquieteth himself in vain, he heapeth up riches," and cannot tell in whose possession they will shortly be. All here are shadows that vanish away:—Man *proclaims* his folly to the world, by the absurdity of the choice he makes of things for his portion;—he chooses what will feed his lusts and starve his soul; he chooses trifles which perish with time in preference to those great things which endure for ever in heaven.—When such a fool comes to *leave this world*, his God will say unto him, "Thou hast received thy good things," now enter on thine eternal poverty: "the harvest is past, the summer is over, and thou art not saved."

5. And some of the children of men make a *very wise choice*. They choose the good part which shall not be taken from them: they choose the true and durable riches, "the unsearchable riches of Christ:" they choose to wait for the inheritance of the saints in

light, rather than to possess the greatest things that this world can give: nay, they will take the spoiling of their goods, that they may have treasures in heaven, and will suffer the loss of all things that they may win Christ, and be found in him. "Moses chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward," Heb. xi. 25, 26.—Yes, the righteous shew their wisdom by their *willingness to suffer* here, that they may enjoy the triumphs of eternity. They suffer with Christ, that they may reign with Christ: they die with him, that they may live with him: they are made in the likeness of his death, that they may be made in the likeness of his resurrection: they go without the camp bearing his reproach, that they may share his triumphs and his joy for ever. Well may they drink here for a few fleeting days, of the bitter cup which he drank of, that they may drink of the rivers of pleasure which flow at God's right hand for evermore: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal," 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.—Here, then, is the *wisdom of the saints*; they choose the good part; they set their affections on things above, walk in the way of life, and lean on their beloved in going

up out of the wilderness, with their faces towards Zion. The men of understanding build on the foundation which God hath laid in Zion, and take shelter in the clefts of the rock of ages, where they find the defence of Christ over them "like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land:" "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it, and is safe."—Well may the children of wisdom *triumph always* in Christ Jesus, though they are appointed to go through tribulation to heaven: "For the wise shall inherit glory, when shame shall be the promotion of fools," Prov. iii. 35. For a short season the godly shall be *sufferers*, seeing they are encompassed with infirmities, temptations and trials, and their names cast out as evil; "Yet say ye to the righteous, it shall be well with him; but woe to the wicked:" for the righteous hath hope in his death; but the wicked is driven away in his wickedness. Death will soon settle this long-disputed point, and will shew who are the wise virgins, and who the foolish; who shall go into Zion, and who shall be excluded.

6. When men have made their choice and have fixed on their portion, they are all anxious to *increase* it: all are treasuring up for times to come. Some lay up for the soul, and some for the body: some for the earth, and some for heaven: some for time, and others for eternity. All are striving to be rich and abound in what they have set their hearts upon, whether it be the substance, or the shadows; whether it be for the salvation, or for the destruction of the soul. All strive to

increase their treasure, and enlarge their source of happiness.—To be convinced of this, observe these four classes of men.

Look at *notorious sinners*, who live after the flesh, and make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. They add sin to sin, and drunkenness to thirst: they go on from iniquity unto iniquity, till iniquity becomes their ruin. There are numerous multitudes in this Christian land, who never seek nor covet any higher enjoyment than the gratification of their appetites and passions: they go forward and plunge deeper in all abominations, and so “treasure up wrath against the day of wrath.” After you look at these degraded rebels against heaven, and observe that they are very diligent in adding to their treasures of guilt and wrath, turn and look at another class,

The more *refined sons of pleasure* and dissipation. How do multitudes of the gay and great of this world, spend their time and talents? Not at all better employed than butterflies that paint their wings, or spiders that weave their poisonous, useless webs. These airy sons of dissipation move truly in a vain shadow. The only heaven they know, covet, or seek after, is to abound in pleasures that disqualify them for the heaven of God, and fit them for the torments of eternity: but having chosen the pleasures of the flesh for their portion of happiness, they strive to increase them; they travel from city to city, from kingdom to kingdom, and compass sea and land in quest of new or additional enjoyments; they will spend their thousands freely to keep these pleasures alive, and to keep their

lusts from pining. When they drink deep of these intoxicating draughts of sinful gratifications, they cry exulting, "To-morrow shall be as to-day, and much more abundant." While this language is yet in their mouths, Death starts unlooked for from behind the curtain, and apprehends them as high offenders against the Majesty of heaven, and saith, 'You must come away, and take your trial before the tribunal of God, whose gifts you have abused, whose laws you have trampled upon, and whose gospel you have despised.' Then, in a moment, they bid eternal adieu to all their pleasures, sink into a sea of the bitterest sorrow, and weep for ever, without a ray of hope. "Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, and would consider their latter end!"

There is another very numerous class, who have set their hearts upon *riches*. They love the world, and the things that are in the world, when their hearts are alienated from the living God. "They have loved idols, and after them they will go." When once they have chosen the riches of earth for their portion, they are ever intent upon increasing it; they add to it, and, let the heap be ever so large, they still add, and are no more satisfied than the horse-leech. Their mouth is "like an open sepulchre," ever ready to swallow more, after it has already swallowed its millions: the grave stands ready to swallow millions more, and so is the earthly mind. All such men are under the impression, that their happiness will increase with their riches: But who has found it so? Can earthly riches help them to heaven, or wean them from

the earth? What use do these wretched worldlings make of their riches? They make idols of them, and set aside their God: they make chains to bind their souls to the earth: they set their great heaps as rocks and mountains between themselves and heaven: "how hardly then shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of heaven?" Riches are snares: they have wings also to fly away: they who trust to them, lean on a reed: they who make gold their confidence, and make haste to be rich, "fall into temptation and a snare, and many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition," 1 Tim. vi. 9. When they who trust to uncertain riches come to leave the world, God will say to them, "Thou hast received thy good things," now take thine evil things. On this they go away naked, sink into the eternal poverty of Dives, and "This shall be their portion to drink."

The *men of grace* also try to increase their portion. In one point of view their portion cannot be increased; "for the Lord is the portion of their souls," Psalm cxix. 57. All they try, is to possess and enjoy their portion more and more: they strive to grow in the knowledge of God their Saviour, and to grow up in all things in Christ Jesus; to drink deeper into his mind and spirit; to be transformed more into his likeness, and enjoy more intimate communion with their beloved Lord and Saviour.—While worldly minds strive for the things of earth and time, they strive to be *rich towards God*, and to lay up their treasures in heaven. The grand aim of a true Christian is, "to grow in grace:" to lay faster hold on eternal life: to go more

out of himself, and more into Christ: to make progress in the way everlasting, and be made more meet for the inheritance of the saints in light: to produce more of the fruits of righteousness, and obtain more complete victory over all his enemies.—They who live by faith on the Son of God, grow richer by *every act of faith* on him. Divine faith is a principle of extraordinary power and properties: it takes possession of all it touches: if it lays hold on eternal life, on the kingdom of heaven, and on the fulness of Christ, it makes all its own. The Christian believer grows richer by laying out his *talents* in the service of his God. The more he lays out for his Lord and Master, the more he lays up for himself.

7. That which men pursue with diligence, and delight in as their chief object, *must be their portion*. “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Mat. vi. 21. The *four* classes which we have considered will find it so.—They who seek their chief happiness in the indulgence of their *appetites and passions*, and in the gratification of their sinful lusts, are never to expect any higher pleasure, nor look for this pleasure long. In their state, the hope of heaven is daring arrogance and blind presumption. For, to delight in uncleanness is to hate holiness. “And without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”—And what is to be the portion of those “who live in *pleasure*, and are dead while they live?” They shall enjoy for a season the things they love. They shall run a circle of dissipated pleasures. And as they prefer their carnal mirth to the joys of heaven, they have no ground to

expect for their portion, any other pleasures than those which they have decidedly preferred. All the heaven that these merry triflers are ever to look for or expect, is the *mirth of time*, for the enjoyment of which they voluntarily sell the joys of heaven. They are so happy now in pursuing their vain amusements, that the very name of Christ, or the bare mention of salvation would only damp their joy. When summoned to judgment, where are their joys then? They are gone for ever, never to return, and are followed with endless weeping: their wine then turns to gall and wormwood. The mysterious hand-writing on the wall of the polluted palace of Belshazzar quickly put an end to his mirth and feasting: his happiness vanished for ever, and all was misery.—And what shall they have for their portion who have set their affections on things that are on the *earth*, and not on things above? These may even miss the things which they love; but they can have no reason to expect the things of the Spirit, which they never loved. The riches which they have heaped up, are all left behind when they die, and they have nothing treasured up in heaven. What madness then must it be to prefer the perishing to the durable riches!—The *godly* also shall inherit the portion they have chosen. Whatever may be thought of them now by a blind world, all will acknowledge in the end, that the godly are the only wise people. When all other descriptions of men are stripped of their treasures, and sink into endless poverty, the righteous shall keep possession of their treasures and inherit life eternal. Their treasures are “the sure mercies of David,” secured to

them by an everlasting covenant. Who can deprive them of their portion? Their inheritance fadeth not away, but is reserved in heaven for them. And they are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. 1 Pet. i. 4, 5. They and their inheritance are together in Christ: and both are safe.

8. And does not every man discover the *state of his heart* by the choice he makes, and the object he pursues? When men are at liberty to act, without compulsion or restraint, will not every man go after what he loves most and delights most in? Yes, every man living shews the state of his soul, by what he pursues and seeks habitually with the greatest diligence and delight. If then you covet, seek, and desire *earthly* treasures and *carnal* delights more ardently than the riches of grace, and the spiritual enjoyment of the salvation of Christ, where then is the difficulty of knowing, that the state of your heart is earthly, sensual, and far from God? Were they who wallow in sin, to pretend that they delight in holiness; were they who are intoxicated with sensual pleasures, to tell you that their hearts are spiritual; or were covetous worldlings to protest that their affections are not on the earth, but on things above; who has faith enough to believe them? Every tree produceth fruit according to its own nature. "We do not gather grapes from thorns, nor figs from thistles." Therefore, "by their fruit ye shall know them."—On the other hand, if men's hearts delight more in *spiritual*, than in carnal things, and seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness, what should hinder such men to know that their hearts are renewed by grace,

and that their portion is the Lord their God?—No man need be *at a loss to know* what is the state of his own soul, and what will be his portion hereafter. Let any man ascertain what are his chief delights and pursuits, and what are his habitual desires, longings, and endeavours, and he may by this ascertain the real state of his soul and the tone of his heart. And when a man knows the state of his heart, where lies the difficulty to know where will be his habitation and inheritance for ever?

II. This younger son LAYS CLAIM to his portion as *a due debt*, which he thinks his father owes him. “Father, give me the portion of goods *that falleth* to me,” or, that which of right belongs to me. I ask only for that which I can claim as my own, and what thou owest me. And I now come to demand it, that I may spend it as I please. This is very impertinent language from a son to a father. Had his father complied with his request, and given him all he asked for, I doubt whether he would have been well pleased, nor much gratified, for not one particle of all his father’s property of right belonged to him: and all that he deserved at his father’s hand was the rod of correction.—By the conduct of this son, we are instructed how all the unregenerate act towards God. What we see in his spirit, language and conduct, may be seen in all sinners while they continue in the state of nature. Keep in mind that this younger son, until he returns again to his father’s house, represents *all sinners without grace*, and without God: and on his return home, he represents all true penitents who obtain mercy and find grace and salvation.—Let

us now inquire what *evils* appear in this arrogant claim, "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me."

1. We see first of all the *dreadful pride* of the human heart, and man's vain conceit of his own *merits and deservings*. All blind sinners think surely that God's blessings, both temporal and spiritual, belong of right to them as due debts. All men learn this lesson in the school of nature, that they deserve some benefits, some comforts, some blessings, at the hand of their Lord and Maker. Grace alone can truly convince any sinner that he deserves not so much as a mouthful of air or a drop of water at the hands of his Creator, and that he is unworthy of "less than the least of all his mercies." Why is the world so full of murmurs, so dissatisfied and complaining? Men think surely that God afflicts them with sufferings they never deserved, or that he withholds from them comforts and blessings which they have a right to. If they believed neither, they would cease from murmuring, as they would see that there was no room nor cause for complaining. "Why should a living man complain?" Yet he often will complain, if he only sees his neighbour in more favourable circumstances than himself. But why murmur on this account? He thinks injustice is done to him, and that he deserves better treatment. God alone can convince man that he is a pensioner that lives even in temporal blessings on the free undeserved bounty of his Maker.

How much more so in *spiritual* things! What grace, what favour, what blessing can a sinner deserve, who

has broken the laws of heaven and rebelled against his God? Has not he by his transgressions forfeited heaven and earth : forfeited all blessings in time and eternity, and brought himself under the curse of the law, and the wrath of his God? And what atonement can he ever make? His eternal weeping would not satisfy for one sin. And what one blessing in salvation can he possibly deserve, by his imperfect and polluted obedience? While all the saints in heaven ascribe the whole of their salvation to free grace, and render praises to God and the Lamb, sinners on earth dream of their own merits. This is the base on which the whole fabric of Roman Antichrist is built; and every man by nature furnishes very proper materials for such a building. All entertain very favourable ideas of their merits, till the Holy Ghost convinceth them of sin, and shews to them that they merit nothing but hell. Even penitents are long before they wholly relinquish the doctrine of human merit, 'Oh,' says the penitent, 'could I mourn and weep enough, God would accept of me.' These secretly think that there is some merit in a flood of tears, and therefore strive to shed them, instead of throwing themselves on the mercies of God in Christ Jesus, the only way of salvation.

2. The sinner by demanding his portion, and wishing to have all his goods in his own power and at his own disposal, aims at *Independence*. He means to set up for himself, and to be no longer a dependent pensioner, living from day to day on the charitable bounty of his Lord and Master. This is one of the greatest evils that loads the earth with guilt: Man aiming at indepen-

dence ! It is of all others the greatest vanity, presumption, and folly. It is a sin that pervades the whole human race. All the children of Adam fall into the delusion of their first parents, " That they shall be as gods." But of all beings in God's creation, not one appears to be so dependent as man : he is far more so than any other creature on earth. His wants are numerous beyond all calculation : some of them real, and some artificial : he has natural and spiritual wants : wants for time and wants for eternity : wants for every member of the body and every faculty of the soul. In youth, in age, in affluence and poverty, in life and death ; man is full of wants. All things through the vast creation were ordained to supply the wants of man, and to administer to his comforts. And all are far too little ; man continues full of wants in every station of life, and under the most favourable circumstances.

Man appears to be more or less dependent upon *every creature*, great and small, for his support or comfort : much more so than any other creature, because his wants are greater and more numerous. Give the beasts of the field grass to eat, water to drink, and ground to lie on, and their wants are all supplied. But let man have what you will, his wants still continue. And for the supply of his necessities he is dependent upon every creature. He is dependent on the sun for light ; on the air for breath ; on the earth for bread to satisfy his hunger ; and on the springs of water to quench his thirst. Let the sun withdraw its light, man walks in darkness : let the air cease to blow, and man breathes no more : let the

earth withhold its produce, man starves with hunger : let all the springs of water be dried up, and man dies with thirst. So dependent a creature is helpless man, that you can hardly name a thing in all creation but man owes it something, whether he knows it or no, for his pleasures and supplies. And this is true of every man in every state, age and station. High and low, rich and poor together are full of the deepest need. The poor have many wants; the rich many more than they. To exalt man in the world, is to make him poor : for his wants increase and multiply faster than his comforts. So then, man is dependent upon every thing in all creation, and all things here below administer some supply for his wants; yet man continues poor and a needy creature, without half his wants supplied.

3. What then must be man's dependence upon God for *spiritual treasures*? If he is so dependent on things in creation for his temporal subsistence and delights, how much more is he dependent on the God of salvation for his spiritual life, and his eternal well-being! Only survey with attention the absolute wants of a sinner while travelling to immortality, and you will soon be convinced that they are neither few nor small. If he has lost all in Adam, he wants all in Christ. Doubtless in Adam he has lost his spiritual life; lost the image and favour of his God; lost his right and title to all blessings and felicity here and for ever.—*And what has he left?* He has a soul of immense value, sunk into poverty, guilt and wretchedness: there he lies,

helpless as he is guilty. What can he do towards his restoration to his lost excellence and felicity? Can he quicken his own soul and give himself life eternal? Can he atone for his transgressions, and purchase the favour of his God? Can he cleanse his polluted nature, or renew the image of God in his heart? Can he regain his forfeited right to felicity in God, or make himself meet for the inheritance of the saints in light? No. As soon can the sinner create a world, as to create his own soul anew, and restore it to righteousness and true holiness. "It cost more to redeem the soul, so that he must let that alone for ever." Let man study his own poverty, wants, and helplessness, and this will humble him.

Let him also know "that all his *help is in the name of the Lord*, who made heaven and earth." None but God our Saviour has any spiritual blessings to bestow. He sells none, and we have nothing to purchase with if he did. He freely *gives* us all things, when we come to rest on him, and live by faith in his name.—The sinner is so dependent upon *Christ* for all the blessings of salvation, "That from him, and through him, and to him, are all things." "In Christ all fulness dwells, and out of his fulness we receive grace upon grace." "In him we live, move, and have our being." From him we receive all, and receive them freely, "without money and without price." Eternal life is his free gift, and he giveth it to whom he will, for no one deserves it more than another. So dependent are we upon the Saviour, that without him we can do nothing and have

nothing; we cannot live without him, "he is our life and we live by him and in him." And our happiness wholly consists in living by faith on Christ and unto Christ.

If the sinner is *so entirely* dependent on the Saviour for all things in salvation, that all spiritual blessings are his free gifts, what folly and madness it is in the sinner to seek for independence! It would be our highest wisdom and chief interest to go wholly out of ourselves and live by faith on Christ crucified, and say truly and cordially to him, "Thou art my PORTION," here and for ever. "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee."

II.—THE CONCEITED WANDERER.

Ver. 13.--*And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country.*

THE younger son having demanded his portion of his father, his father condescendingly complied with his arrogant demand. "He divided unto them his living." No sooner had this young man his portion at command, but he left his father's house without ceremony, and foolishly wandered into a far country, where he wickedly spent all his property. And as the natural

fruit of his own will and extravagant conduct, he sunk into the deepest poverty, and was ready to perish with famine. He tried every mean shift, and submitted to the most degrading drudgery, in order to satisfy his craving hunger; but every effort failed him. Such is the history of every sinner that forsakes his God.

I. To sin, is to DEPART from God.

1. What else is sin, but *alienation of heart* from the living and true God, and setting our affections on something else in preference to him? Sin is leaving the true God, to go after false gods. It is "forsaking the fountain of living waters, for broken cisterns that can hold no water." Should any still inquire what sin is, we answer, the very nature of every sin in the world is to leave God, to shake off his government, and rebel against him. So far as any man is influenced by the principle of sin, so far he removes from his God. It must be said of all the fallen children of Adam, "Your sins have separated between you and your God." The more we sin, the farther we remove from him: for every sin we commit is a step towards hell, and fits the sinner for final destruction. What deep need then have we of the Saviour's grace to restore our wandering hearts to our forsaken Father, and to subdue the power of sin within us, that we wander and rebel no more.

What is man *doing* when he forsakes the living and true God? He gives up at once all excellence, happiness and glory. When he departs from God himself, he gives up all that God has to bestow on man. He gives up his favour, love, and grace; all the rivers of his tender mercies; all his spiritual blessings in heavenly

places in Christ Jesus: he gives up the kingdom of God; his great salvation which shall be for ever, and the exceeding great and eternal weight of glory. Every transgression forfeits all the gifts, blessings, and felicity which God has to bestow on his creature man. How little does the sinner think of this, when he runs to his favourite sins with as much relish, as a glutton to a delicious feast, “and drinks iniquity like water?”

2. Surely there must be some *extraordinary allure-ment* in sin, or it never could prevail on man, a rational being, to forsake his God, to forfeit his favour, and incur his anger for ever. There must be incomparable loveliness, the greatest gain, the sweetest pleasure, and the most refined enjoyment in sin, or it never could allure such an intelligent being, as man is, to forsake his Creator, and forfeit all the high and endless felicity, which God has to bestow on him——No——strange to tell, the very *reverse* of all this is the true character of sin. Sin is of all others the greatest deformity. It is vileness itself: the destroyer of happiness, and the fountain of misery. It is the only thing that God hates, that can ruin man, or form a hell.—Only think what sin *has done*. One sin ruined a world, and brought death into it: marred and polluted the fair creation of Jehovah, and made the whole earth to rebel against heaven. It has done more; it has filled this world with all manner of miseries: filled heaven with anger, and hell with torments. And to complete its direful malignity, it “murdered the Lord of glory.”

Detestable and ruinous as sin is, most men are exceedingly *enamoured* with it, yea far more strongly

attached to it than they are to the inestimable blessings which are to be found in the Redeemer's kingdom; and would much rather walk in the vile and slippery paths of sin, than in the ways of holiness and righteousness.—So strong their attachment to sin, that the wisdom of heaven fails to persuade them to turn away from it. They will not listen to the voice of the heavenly charmer, charm he never so wisely. You cannot allure their hearts from sin by any reward that can be offered: offer them the kingdom of heaven they will reject it, rather than forsake their beloved lusts. And no threatenings will frighten them out of their sinful ways. Tell them, that “the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God,” they will neither hear nor believe you, but rush madly on in pursuit of sinful delights. Yea rather than forsake all their favourite sins, they will run the risk of losing forever the rivers of pleasures which flow at God's right-hand in heaven. Nay, they will run the risk of suffering the vengeance of eternal fire, rather than turn from sin to God. To be convinced of all this, you have only to open your eyes, and take a fair survey of the manners of men that live in a land of Bibles and gospel ordinances.

3. But what is there in sin that so powerfully wins the hearts of men after it?—The DECEIVABLENESS of it.—This is the only answer that can be given. Sin is a world of deceit, and so subtle a deceiver, that it has deceived all the nations upon earth. The main strength of every sin in the world consists in its artful nature to deceive the heart of man: and sin has many artful

ways to allure mankind.—It deceives by *darkening the understanding*, till men cannot discern the real nature of things. And in their blindness they commit the most ruinous mistakes. “They put light for darkness, and darkness for light: they put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.” When darkness hath blinded their eyes, they make a strange choice. They prefer what will gratify the flesh before what would save the soul; prefer sin to grace; and prefer earth to heaven. Walking in this darkness, they know not whither they go, and think they are in the way to Canaan, while they are going back to Egypt. “Darkness hath covered the earth, and gross darkness the people.” And in this darkness which sin has brought upon the earth, the children of men wander from God. “A deceived heart hath turned them aside.”—Sin deceives also by nourishing *unbelief* in the hearts of men. They give no credit to the testimony of God. While they allow all, they believe nothing of what God saith of the sinner, or of the Saviour. They do not really believe what is said of sin and death, or they could not sin as they do. Neither do they believe what they hear of grace and salvation, or they would strive to enter into the kingdom. Sinners are so blinded that they neither see the deformity and evil of sin, nor the glory of Christ and the greatness of his salvation. Believing nothing, they lie down contentedly in the bosom of sin, on the bed of death.—Sin also deceives by *hardening* the heart of man. The very nature of sin is to harden the heart. The more a man sinneth, the more callous his heart grows; and being led on

from evil to greater evil, he is gradually prepared for the commission of the greatest crimes. "He is hardened through the deceitfulness of sin," Heb. iii. 13. Sin first deceives and then kills, Rom. vii. 11. It is like the spider alluring the fly into his web, and when entangled, poisons him. "Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil," Prov. xii. 20.

4. But the main power of sin to deceive consists in the ILLUSIONS of Satan through the medium of sin. Satan's work-shop is in the imagination of man, Eph. ii. 2. And the main art of his trade is to gild and varnish every bait with which he allures the senses of fallen man. He far excels all beings in the whole creation in the art of painting. He can make his counterfeits appear to our senses far more beautiful and precious than the king's coin. He presents all things unto us in deceitful mirrors, which make all objects to appear the very reverse of what they really are. And he will never allow us, if he can help it, to look at any object whatever, but in his mirrors. Here he paints all the ways of sin in the most captivating and alluring style, pleasant, delightful and highly gratifying, strewed with flowers and smoothed with oil, every way attractive to our corrupted nature. But the ways of holiness and righteousness which lead to heaven, he paints as most repulsive, rugged and perplexed: ways of gloom and darkness, destitute of all pleasure, and full of pain, fit only for the ignorant vulgar, and deluded fools. Satan's panoramas deceive and ruin countless millions of human beings. In one of these he paints the world with grandeur and glory

that eclipse heaven, and make the treasures of earth to appear to worldly hearts far more to be desired than the unsearchable riches of Christ. Here lies "the deceitfulness of riches," in Satan's illusions and fallacious paintings.—In another of his delusive panoramas Satan spreads a disgusting veil of darkness over all the glory of the Saviour's kingdom, and paints every thing of a holy and spiritual nature in such black and frightful characters, that most men startle back, and will have nothing to do with the pure religion of the Son of God. These are properly called "The wiles of the devil." "We are not ignorant of Satan's devices." He presents his intoxicating draughts in golden cups: He hides the destructive dagger under a velvet robe, and wraps his poisonous pills in golden leaves. He transforms himself into an angel of light, and, with his artful guile and delusive frauds, deceives the nations, and allures them into his kingdom; which procured him the name of, "The god of this world, and prince of darkness." Having such a formidable enemy, and being encompassed with so many and great dangers, what great need have we of the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil! When he assaults us with his subtle artifice and delusions, we cannot say that he has nothing in us; For our hearts are "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." Nothing short of the grace, wisdom, and strength of the All-wise and Almighty Saviour is sufficient for us. Then for grace, let us never cease to pray.—We have now heard, that to sin is to *depart* from God: that men are allured to sin

by the *deceitfulness* of it: and that the chief part of Satan's power to deceive and allure our hearts consists in *illusion*.

II. All sinners that are carried away with the love of sin, do ACTUALLY LEAVE GOD and depart. Of all the mistakes committed under the sun, this is by far the greatest and the most ruinous. "Lord, they know not what they are doing," when they depart from thee! Many have been ready to break their hearts when forced to leave their native land to see it no more for ever; yet men can leave God without reluctance. How greatly frightened are the men who have their portion of good things in this life, at the thought of leaving the world, and going into eternity. But what is parting with a dying world compared with departing from the living God? How much does the sinner give up when he leaves his Lord and Saviour, to go into a far country! He gives up an everlasting kingdom, endless life, with eternal weight of glory. He gives up the great salvation of Christ; the inheritance of the saints in light, and all, all the rivers of pleasures that flow for ever at God's right hand in heaven. All this extravagant folly and wickedness they commit; but they know not what they are doing, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead to counsel and warn them: for they have already rejected the counsel of the Most High, and trifled with thousand solemn warnings from heaven itself. Let us proceed to inquire *why* do sinners leave God to go into a far country? Some of the causes are these,

1. They *do not know what is to be found in God.*—

All sinners in the state of nature are spiritually blind :
“ Having eyes that cannot see, and hearts that cannot understand. The light which is in them is darkness.”
“ The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God ; for they are foolishness unto him : neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned,” 1 Cor. ii. 14. What but ignorance of the living God made the nations of the earth to go after dead gods, made of wood and stone ? And what but ignorance of the Lord Jehovah makes multitudes in a christian land to prefer the world and sin before Christ and his kingdom ? Millions of men, called Christians, cry with Pharaoh, “ Who is the Lord, that we should obey him ? ” In their ignorance they think that he is such an one as themselves, one that will make a mock of sin.—They know not the *happiness* that is to be found in God, and therefore are easily prevailed upon to leave him, and go after idols into a far country. None but the Holy Ghost can remove this darkness from the human mind. Let all those that dread an eternal night, pray God the Spirit to shine into their hearts, to give them the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, the people who *know* the Lord, and have seen the glory of Christ, and drank of his love, can never be prevailed upon to leave Christ and his kingdom. They have tasted that the Lord is gracious, and found rest unto their souls under the shadow of the wings of the Almighty, where they enjoy peace that passeth all understanding, and hope full of immortality : Finding such transcendent felicity in communion

with God, they sing as they go the heavenly road, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee:" "I count all things but loss in comparison of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus." No bribe that can ever be offered will prevail on these to give up Christ and his salvation: offer them all the wealth of the globe, they say, It is nothing but worthless trash to what we have in Christ, where we have the true, the durable, and unsearchable riches: offer them all the pleasures of the flesh and the joys of the world, they answer, 'No, these poison the soul; but we have refined pleasures in the Saviour, which flow in endless rivers.' Were you to offer them all the honours that come from man, to allure them away from Christ, these also they would reject with disdain, and would say, 'All these are empty bubbles; but we have the honours that come from God, the honour of being made sons and daughters, kings and priests, and heirs of God.' So, nothing can wean from the Saviour the souls that know his name. And they that know not the Lord, voluntarily depart from him, and go in quest of happiness into a far country.

2. Sinners depart from God because of their *disagreement, or contrariety of natures*. They are in their principle, heart, and nature directly contrary to all that God is; God is holy, and they are vile: God is righteous, and they are sinful: God is purity and truth, and they are nothing but a lie and deceit: God is love, and they are enmity. No wonder they leave one they are so unlike to; "for how can two walk

together except they be agreed?" There can be no harmony and friendship between parties whose very natures are in direct opposition. Discord and war must take place where *natures* disagree. What is man in his natural state but an enemy of God? "Ye are enemies unto God by wicked works." Nay more, "The carnal mind is enmity against God." This opposition of nature induces the sinner to leave the Lord and wander into a far country.

Graceless sinners cannot *abide nearness* unto the Lord: nothing is so intolerable to them. Cain in his enmity, and Jonah in his anger, fled from the presence of the Lord, and went, as they thought, into a far country. There is, indeed, no place where God is not; yet there are places where he manifests forth his glory, and where his true worship is set up. Graceless sinners hate to be near these places, because Jehovah is there. There are some rays of the glory of God on his tabernacles, his spiritual church here in the wilderness, and faint traces of his image seen in his believing people. So strong is the enmity of the carnal mind against God, that sinners cannot abide even these glimmering appearances of his glory. How disgusting are the prayers and the praises of spiritual men to carnal minds. They hate such music, and delight to ridicule it, while they admire the songs of the drunkards, and enjoy the mirth of revellers, though it be nothing else than the mirth of criminals in their way to the place of execution. Such men are always glad, when they can remove far enough from praying families and from temples where Christ is faithfully preached. All

this proceeds from hatred to God. And what means all the opposition made to the faithful ambassadors of Christ, but resistance offered to Christ himself: "He that rejecteth you rejecteth me." All dislike to hear the everlasting gospel of the blessed God, proceeds from hatred to Christ, and enmity against God. When bad names are given to Christ's religion, and good names to the persecutors of it, then the enemies of true holiness proceed most conscientiously in their enmity against God, and go as far from him as they can.

What have those men *to fear* that continue in a state of enmity against God? And this every sinner on earth is doing whose heart is not reconciled unto him. Will not the Judge of the whole earth say of such men, in the last day, "But those, mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me," Luke xix. 27. "Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God," Psalm cxxxix. 19. How truly marvellous is the grace of God in the salvation of sinners! "When we were yet sinners, Christ died for us:" "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." From among his enemies hath God chosen his children: and truly marvellous is that grace, that changes enemies into sons and daughters of God Almighty. Of grace will these eternally sing.

3. Sinners depart from God because of their *strong aversion to his laws and government*. They love licentious liberty and hate control. They detest the laws that command their obedience to their Maker; that

lay restraint on their corruptions ; or that punish them for their offences. Command them to serve the Lord, they cry, " Who is the Lord, that we should obey him ? " Tell them to submit to his government, they will say, " Who is Lord over us ? " Remind them of what God and his Christ require at their hands, instead of obeying, they say, " Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us," Psalm ii. 3. Rebuke them for the abuse of their tongues, they will tell you, ' Our tongues are our own, and we shall make what use we please of them.' Put them in mind that Christ is Lord over all, they cry mightily, " We will not have this man to reign over us." All sinful lusts in fallen nature are clamorous for *indulgence*, and eager for gratification. Every sin strives to break forth into full action, and revel without control. Therefore sinners abhor the government of Jehovah, which lays restraints on their evil propensities. These restraints they cannot endure, and in the hope of obtaining unbounded liberty to riot in iniquity, they leave God, and wander into a far country.

But is the government of God our Saviour *hard to endure* ? No ; to none but the rebellious who can bear no restraints to their riotous living. All the loyal subjects of the king of Sion glory in his government, and delight in obeying the laws of his kingdom. For upon trial they find that his dominion is the dominion of love, mercy, and grace : under the protection of which they find a full supply for all their wants, and a safe refuge from all their dangers. They find his laws to be righteous

and benevolent laws, denying them nothing but what would be to their hurt, and requiring nothing but what is for their benefit. Yes, all the faithful subjects of king Jesus will bear their willing testimony that his commandments are not grievous, but joyous; that his yoke is easy and his burden light; that his service is perfect freedom; and that all his ways are ways of pleasantness, and his paths, paths of peace. These happy subjects are joyful in their king.

We have now noticed *some* of the things that induce sinners to depart from their God—They know not what is to be found in God—Their sinful nature is contrary to him—And they cannot abide his righteous laws and holy government—They also feel themselves great debtors, in a state of bankruptcy, and therefore run away from their creditor—And they vainly hope for increasing happiness in a state of alienation from God.

III. And he went into a FAR country.

1. This prodigal son *set off immediately*, as soon as he received his portion. In parting he did not so much as ask for his father's blessing, and said not a word about the time he should come home again, for he never meant to return. He dreamt of a delightful paradise in some very distant country, but knew not where. So he set off in very high spirits, and rapidly sailed down the deep river of human depravity, and for a time was excessively gratified with his quick movement and pleasant sailing, not at all aware, nor once suspected, that this broad enchanting river flowed in a direct course down to the sea of endless perdition.—Man stays with God just so long as God holds him

fast, and not a moment longer. Even innocent Adam departed from his Creator, as soon as he was left to himself. It is the current opinion that he continued but a few hours in a sinless state. What then can we expect from the sinful children of Adam, but apostacy? In themselves they are perfect weakness, without holiness, and full of corruption. Their very nature is to wander from their Maker: the world is full of snares and allurements to draw them aside; and Satan is full of subtilty and cunning to deceive them. No wonder then that the multitudes of the ungodly wander from the Lord into a far country. Nay, the children of grace who are born of God, and have eternal life abiding in them, will stand no longer than the Lord supports them. Let him take his hand away from underneath them, and they are down, as you may see in the case of Lot, David, and Peter. Had God left Paul to himself at the gate of heaven, he would have fallen headlong into apostacy and despair. What warnings have we here not to trust to our own strength! What need have we to lean on the arm of the Lord! If man is so feeble and so full of evil even in his best state, what room is there for pride? what cause for humility! and what deep need have we of crying to God our Saviour, all the way to heaven, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." All that are kept upright to the end, "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation:" and to him alone will they ascribe their safety, when they arrive at home in their Father's kingdom.

2. The *more bountiful* the Almighty is to man, the

more undutifully man, in general, acts towards God. When the prodigal received his portion, he turned his back on his father, and set up for himself, in opposition to him. The more the Lord multiplies his earthly blessings on graceless sinners, the more they multiply their offences against heaven. When he sends them provisions to benefit their souls, they take them to feed their lusts, and to satisfy the will of the flesh. If the Lord gives the gold and jewels of the Egyptians to the Israelites, they make gods of them. If he feeds them with bread from heaven, they loath it and murmur. If he gives them a land flowing with milk and honey, they defile it with idolatry, and fill it with pride and oppression. No sooner did the Lord fill the land with silver and gold and chariots, but they filled it with idols and all abominations. Moses tells them plainly, 'the more kind and bountiful your God is to you, the more ungrateful and rebellious you grow.' "Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked;" see Deut. xxxii. 9—15. How frequently and solemnly does he warn them of their danger of forgetting the Lord, when they grow prosperous in Canaan.

You have only to observe the *manners of men* in general to be convinced, that the better God is to graceless sinners, the worse they grow. Where the Lord exalts men in wealth and power, Satan exalts them in pride and irreligion. "If riches increase, they set their hearts upon them." If the world smiles, they worship it and forget God. Many that cry unto the Lord on a bed of sickness and pain, employ their tongues in curses when he restores them to health.

What gift of God but sinners pervert into occasions of sin and wickedness ! If men think they excel in body or mind, they are prone to abuse these powers to sin more against the Lord.

Ye men of God, *be not conformed* to this world : act not like those who have their good things here, but act on your own heavenly principles. Let every gift of God draw your hearts more to himself. When the sun of earthly prosperity shines bright ; when the candle of the Lord is on your dwelling ; take heed that you forsake not the Lord your God, who maketh you to prosper. When he exalts you with prosperity, you should sink in humility, fear, and trembling. Let Christians see to it, that no bounty or gift of God run away with their hearts, and remove them farther from him ; but let every instance of his loving kindness draw their affections heavenward.

3. The sinner, when once departed from God, is in a VERY FAR COUNTRY. The distance is immense and tremendous : not distance of place, but of state : and without the interposition of grace to restore the sinner, and bring him back to his forsaken God, the distance between them will remain and widen for ever. The distance is very great at first, but the sinner may always go farther. And that is actually the case with all impenitents : their whole life is nothing else but wandering farther from the Lord. And the wandering sinner can never say, ' I have now gone as far as I can go from my Maker.' No ; let him go as far as he will, he may still go farther, for error is infinite, and sin has neither termination nor limits. This long journey, like all

journeys, is performed by *steps*; and every sin that rebels commit in thought, word, or deed, is a step farther off from God, and nearer to final perdition. Little does the sinner think of this when he makes a mock of sin and delights in iniquity.

In what a *very far* country does every unconverted sinner live! Far from what? Not far from death and final ruin; but far from God and salvation: far from safety, happiness, and heaven. All out of Christ are in the land of death; in the kingdom of Satan, and in the road to destruction: but they believe it not, and have no suspicion of danger, though warned from heaven.—It is *such* a far country, that they have lost all knowledge of God, and of every thing that is spiritual, holy, and heavenly. They have no love to Christ, nor any desire to be in his kingdom of grace and salvation—*Dismal land!* Where darkness reigns: where the sun never shines: where heavenly blessings never fall: where sins are never pardoned, and where souls are never saved. All that continue here perish everlastingly.

Yet marvellous to relate, and strange the story we have to tell, numberless hosts of the children of men *continue for ever* in the land of darkness and of death, and never return to God. They are easy and fearless, because they believe nothing of God's testimony. He sends his Ambassadors to invite them, with a promise of free pardon and reconciliation. But so averse are they to return, that they frequently ill-treat the messengers, and grow angry at the offers of mercy. What strange infatuation is this! Preferring the land of

darkness and death to the land of light and life : preferring the reign of sin in the kingdom of Satan to the reign of grace in the kingdom of God's dear Son ! No threatenings, however alarming, can drive them out ; and no gifts or promises that heaven can offer, are sufficient to allure them home. But let them know that " they who are far from God shall perish." And all the pleasures and gratifications which now delight and chain them down, shall perish also. In death they and their pleasure part, to meet no more for ever. And yet for these short lived enjoyments they forfeit an eternal heaven. Awful delusion ! which leads to endless woe.

4. All that are now the *children of grace* and in the way to heaven, have once wandered far from their God. And some of them have been suffered to go very far : to plunge into gross iniquities : to move in the foremost ranks of rebels, and to be guilty of the most daring impiety against heaven. Such was Saul of Tarsus, a persecutor, blasphemer, and chief of sinners ; but it pleased God to make him a vessel of mercy, eminent in grace, and chief of the Apostles. Should any take occasion to say, " Let us sin, that grace may abound, their damnation is just."—Those who are suffered to go into a far country, and afterwards brought home to their Father's house, are taught to *hate sin* with deep and eternal hatred, for they now see clearly that if *grace* had not interposed, sin would soon have carried them down to the bottomless pit, from whence there is no redemption. By such a deliverance they are instructed to admire and adore, to love and to praise

their great and merciful deliverer. They ascribe their whole salvation to the free unbounded grace of their great Redeemer, who had mercy on them, and plucked them as brands from the burning, and carried them from this far and dismal country into his kingdom of salvation. A due sense of this immeasurable kindness of their gracious deliverer fills their hearts for ever with deep humility, love, and gratitude. All the way home to heaven they sing, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give the praise." And when they arrive at home in their Father's kingdom, they will never cease to sing, "Salvation to the Lamb."

Ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, a company that no man can number, of these delivered captives, will at last appear together in Sion, *singing the praises* of redeeming love and saving grace. Their sound will be like the sound of a great thunder, saying, with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing, for ever and ever." Happy the company, melodious the song, and long the day. Their sun will never set. None that *will* stay in the far country will be found there. Then, sinner, flee from Sodom before it burns, and return unto the Lord thy God, and live for ever.

III.—THE RIOTOUS SPENDTHRIFT.

Ver. 13.—*And there wasted his substance with riotous living.*

WE have seen this prodigal son taking his journey into a far country, and now we are informed how he *conducted himself* in that distant land. We cannot reasonably expect to hear any good report of a young man that has acted so very undutifully to his father. He was tired of his house and government; could bear no restraints; and was so self-willed, that he must have every thing at his own command: he could not trust his father to manage for him, but thought he could manage far better for himself; therefore he arrogantly demands his portion. He is indulged with all that he asks for; and the young man, without ceremony, sets off to go into a far country, that he might be no longer under the control of his father.—As soon as he begins to act for himself he grows *worse* than ever. His history darkens as he proceeds. The apostate turns rebel, and spends the riches which his father bestowed on him, in opposition to his will. As we move farther from the sun, we sink into deeper darkness. So, the farther sinners move away from their heavenly Father, the more will sin gain the dominion over them. When once they have left God, what can be expected from them but to go on progressively in their hostility towards him: “They spend all his gifts in *riotous living*.”

What an exact picture of many of *our youth* have we now before us ! Many, when partly grown up and bordering on the age of manhood, become tired of home, and seek their chief enjoyment abroad. At this period of life, when the character is forming, not a few of them become exceedingly proud and conceited, and think far more highly of themselves than their qualifications and virtues would justify. These are apt to look upon all useful employments as unworthy of their attention : they are so high-spirited, that they scorn to remain any longer under the authority of parents, however kind and prudent.—And none are so tired of home, and so impatient of restraints, as some graceless children of *pious parents* : these find the restrictions of religion intolerable, and are in haste to break loose from these bonds, to go as far as they can from under the eye of their fathers, that they may riot and revel without control or restraint. This they falsely call *liberty*, when it is, in fact, the worst of bondage and slavery. They change the government of wise and affectionate parents for the dominion of their own lusts and vices. In their ardent pursuit of sinful pleasures, they contrive to believe that their own will and inclination is the rule of duty, and the sure road to happiness. When once they get into this whirlpool, their heads turn giddy till they lose all distinctions between vice and virtue, and stand ready for any service that Satan chooses to employ them in.

Yet while pursuing this wicked and extravagant course, wild and wasteful, they vainly conceit that they have a *just claim* on their fathers' patrimony, and

arrogantly demand their portion to spend on their wild pursuits and vicious practices. And when they receive their share they soon part with it and come to poverty and want. They mount their high horse and drive furiously, but are soon found wallowing in the mud : the faster they drive in their mad career of dissipation, the sooner they are found trying to fill their bellies at the swine's trough. But, strange to tell, Satan has artfully persuaded the females to think and to say, that '*reformed rakes* make the best husbands.' But can we on any rational ground expect those that have forsaken all virtuous principles, and nourished in themselves all vices, to act better than those who have carefully cultivated all that is amiable and excellent in human nature? Deceptions and errors fill the world, and these lead the deluded to certain misery at the last. Then, above all things, get that wisdom which cometh from above, and is more precious than rubies : "He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul ;" "but fools despise wisdom and instruction," Prov. i. 7.

I. All sinners when they have departed from God, are SPENDTHRIFTS AND GREAT WASTERS. They are doing nothing but spending their Lord's money. No sooner do they receive their portion than they waste it ; and very soon it is all gone, and they are poor indeed, having nothing left but the guilt of their misconduct and its necessary painful consequences. —All sinners out of Christ are spending every gift and talent which their Creator gave them. They take different ways, but they follow the same trade : they may appear to sustain different characters, but they are all

of one spirit: and all, in their own way, determined upon spending what God has given them, and laying up nothing for the life to come.

1. Understand that all the children of men *receive their portion of goods* of the Lord: some gifts and talents are bestowed upon every individual; none go without some talents. It is indeed evident that some receive far more than others;—the Lord acts as a sovereign in the distribution of his gifts;—“He giveth unto every one severally as he will,” to some one talent, to others two, and to others five. He knows what he is doing, and does what is best, and we should be satisfied. Our usefulness and happiness do not consist in the amount of the sum we receive of the Lord, but in the use we make of it; and some do more good with one talent than others with ten. Among the talents we may reckon all our faculties both of body and soul; our time and our life; our earthly treasures and influence, and opportunities to do good; the gospel of Christ and all the means of grace, and divine ordinances.

All men are God's *stewards, not proprietors*. “The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof.” He never gives up his right of property; though he entrusteth his goods in the hands of men, he still retains his right to them. Who can say that so much as their bodies and souls are their own, when the Lord tells them plainly, “Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's,” 1 Cor. vi. 20. Men receive their talents not as their own pro-

perty, but as their Lord's money; "They are made stewards of the manifold gifts of God." When he puts his talents into their hands, he saith unto them, "Occupy till I come:" be faithful over these few things; trade with my money; lay them out as I direct; that thou mayest have a good account to give in the day of reckoning. They are not allowed to spend one penny on their own lusts and carnal pleasures; but all in the service and for the glory of their Lord and Master. "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God," 1 Cor. x. 31. "We must not live unto ourselves, but unto him which died for us." We should never forget, that we are not our own, and that we have nothing that we can call our own property: all are the Lord's, and we are only his stewards; "and it is required of stewards that a man be found faithful," that they may give up their account with joy, and not with sorrow, in God's great day.

2. But sinners in an unregenerate state are doing nothing but *wasting the goods* which their heavenly Father has bestowed upon them, and consuming them on their own lusts. To be convinced of this you have only to observe the state of the world, and see how men live, and what use they make of their different talents, and how they are wasting and abusing.—They abuse the powers of their *bodies*, and waste them in the service of sin. God designed that the body should be a holy vessel, consecrated for his own service; a vessel unto honour, and the temple of the Holy Ghost. But in what a variety of ways do sinners

defile, abuse, and ruin their bodies? But if any man defile the temple of God (or what should have been his temple) him will God destroy. They also waste the faculties and powers of the immortal *soul*. These were given them for high and holy purposes : to serve and honour the Lord, and set forth his praises : to enjoy holy communion with God : to adore him for his grace, and to glorify him for ever. Instead of this, they bury their souls in the earth, and employ all their powers in a thousand different ways of sinning. They also abuse and waste their *earthly treasures*. Many idolize them ; set their hearts upon them, instead of on the giver, and far prefer them to any gifts that Christ has to bestow. These may appear to hoard up riches, but they waste them all, and are in the way to endless poverty. Others again spend them all in gratifying their various lusts and vices ; and they will pay dear for things that destroy both body and soul. Whatever use they make of their treasures, all is wasted, save that alone which they employ in the service and for the glory of God. See, then, that you honour the Lord with your substance : give him all, and you save all : and what you deny unto him is wasted and lost.

3. Sinners in the state of nature waste the *day of salvation*. Important day ! A day of which none can calculate its value : A day in which millions of lost sinners obtain mercy and find grace to save them : and millions more neglect the great salvation and perish in their sins. The short period that man has to live on earth is of a most peculiar nature. It is here that all is to be done for eternity : it is here that we

must be created anew, put off the old man, and put on Christ: it is here we must find salvation, return to God, and be made his children: it is here that we must receive eternal life, meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light, and grace to conduct us safe to glory. Yes, the day of salvation is our seed-time, "and what a man soweth that shall he also reap." As we spend the day of salvation, so shall we be through the ages of eternity. "If ye live after the flesh ye shall die; but if ye through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live," Rom. viii. 13. If so much depends on the right spending of the day of salvation, we might expect to find all men full of concern for their everlasting state; working out their own salvation with fear and trembling; giving all diligence to make their calling and election sure; pressing into the kingdom before their sun goes down.

But alas! it is not so. *Most men waste the day of salvation.* Most men spend their days on earth as if there was no hereafter: They mind earthly things, forget God and die: They lay up their treasures on earth instead of growing rich towards God: They walk in a vain shadow and disquiet themselves in vain; careful indeed about many things, but neglecting the one thing needful, the eternal salvation of their immortal minds. How true is this sad account of men in all ranks in society—Go to the *great men*, to all that have means to support them without labor, how do most of these spend the day of salvation? Surely not in preparing to meet their God, "God is not in all their thoughts," and serious religion is their perfect scorn, fit for none, in

their esteem, but for deluded enthusiasts. These verily walk in a vain shadow, in an airy element, and in a pestilential atmosphere. Gay amusements, dissipated pleasures, and the gratification of the flesh, form all the happiness they know, and all the heaven they covet or seek after. Thus do these waste the day of salvation, lose the kingdom, and sink into a dark eternity.—Go next to the men of *business*, who carry on trades and merchandise or agriculture, take a fair survey of these; weigh them in the balance of the sanctuary, see how they employ their minds, their strength, their time and talents, that you may form a right judgment how they spend the day of salvation. Is it not evident, that by far the greater part of these bury their talents in the earth, set their affections on the things of this world, “and mind earthly things?” The love of riches and the cares of the world crowd on their minds, and so occupy their time and attention that they have neither leisure nor inclination to attend to their spiritual and eternal concerns. So the day of salvation passeth by, while they have made no provisions for the world to come.—Go to the *rising generation*, who are yet free from the cares of this world, and see what they are pursuing. At this early period of life, they boil with spirits and are full of action. If left to themselves to follow the bent of their fallen nature, they are sure to go wrong. And frequently, in spite of the best instructions, they break every band to follow the strong bias of their depraved hearts, and to join the multitude to do evil. The youth of every age, with few exceptions, flow in one direction. They forget God, revel in sin,

and banish reflection. They tempt and animate one another to proceed in riotous living. In their blindness and thoughtlessness, they give the best of their days to vanity and folly, without even considering the serious injury they are doing to their own souls, in wandering from their God. Dear youth, stop for a moment, and listen attentively to this one solemn sentence: The day of salvation is passing by: It soon will come to an end, and thy sun may set, before thy soul is saved.—Go lastly to the *laborious poor*, and see what use they make of the day of salvation. To them the gospel is preached, and many of them hear it gladly, for God hath chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of salvation. But even among these we find multitudes that live far from God. They labor for the meat that perisheth, and not for the meat that endured to everlasting life. The chief desire of the graceless poor is either to ward off pinching poverty from their dwellings, or to gratify their lusts in intoxication. These also waste the day of salvation, and lose both worlds.—If the picture here drawn of all classes of men be false, reject it, and forgive the writer; but if it be true, weep over your perishing brethren, who waste the day of salvation, and so lose eternal life.

4. Sin is of all others the *worst spendthrift* and the greatest waster. More goes to support sin than to sustain nature. One sin costs more than a hundred families. Sin pollutes, wastes, and ruins all it touches. It has sent hosts of angels from glory to eternal torments: It has ruined a world in the bosom of Adam, while Adam was in the bosom of God: Sin murdered

the Lord of glory, and sin will be the torment of all its own servants and lovers for ever. See what a waster is sin! How much happiness it destroys, and what numbers it ruins! The whole earth groans under its wasteful hand. It melts down many of the finest estates; it levels lofty palaces with the ground; overturns thrones, and ruins empires: It wastes what is of far greater value than they all, it wastes the lives of men on earth by turning away their attention from the great concern.

If you wish to know what a waster sin is, look at lost sinners in the *day of death*. They have wasted every thing, and have nothing left but sin, and the wages of sin, which is death. They once had a day of salvation, but they wasted it, and it is now gone. They once had the holy sabbaths to attend in the courts of the Lord, and hear the everlasting gospel; but they wasted them all, and they are gone by. What great wasters have they been! They have wasted their time, their talents, their strength, and their life: they have wasted all the means of grace, and the fine opportunities they once had of securing heaven and going there: But now all is lost. They leave the world without God, without salvation, and without hope. Is there poverty like unto their poverty? Whether they will lay it to heart or not, this is the case with all Christless sinners in the hour of death. They have *spent all*, and now they have nothing to take away with them into the eternal world, but guilt, poverty, and death.

5. The men of grace have treasures which they *can never spend*. They are the true and durable riches,

which always last. The children of grace alone act the wise part; they have made a wise and happy choice. They have chosen for their treasures and inheritance, things which can *never perish*, but will endure for ever in heaven: things which are incorruptible, undefiled, and that never fade away. They have chosen treasures that are so *immensely great* that they never can be spent, even "the fulness of Christ, in whom all fulness dwells." And their portion is as *safe* as it is great and lasting. It is in Christ, secured unto them by "an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." "Their inheritance is reserved for them in heaven, and they are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." Hear the triumphant song of every true pilgrim while travelling through the wilderness, "God is the portion of my soul, therefore will I hope, He also is become my salvation." God from on high animates the song and saith to them, "My salvation shall be for ever," "I am your God, and ye shall be my people." In hearing this, their hearts take fire and cry aloud, "This God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our guide even unto death."

Will any after all ask, What *advantages* have the men of grace over the men of the world? We answer, They have a far better portion, and more enduring inheritance. When the men of the world have wasted all their goods and have nothing, "the children of God shall have enough," in the "fulness of him that filleth all in all." They shall always have the fountain of life, when the men of the world with their broken cisterns, which could hold no water, are left without resource. No trea-

asures will always last, or long endure, but the treasures which believers have in Christ. Were the men of the world to possess the fulness of the world, they would soon spend it all and come to poverty. All things in creation are perishing things, and the world itself passeth away. When the vessel sinks at sea, all the goods on board, however valued, must sink with it. When the world passeth away, where then are your dwellings, treasures, and inheritances? They are gone for ever.—So then we find that the men of this world, of every description, spend their lives on earth in doing nothing but wasting the goods which their heavenly Father has given them, and that in a country far from God. In a few years they spend all, and sink at last into endless poverty.

II. The men of this world not only waste all the gifts and talents which their Creator has given them, but they spend them all in *RIOTOUS LIVING*. This solemn charge is brought against all the sons of men, till they become sons of God. Not only against those that are notorious sinners, and a nuisance to society; but also against the most orderly and moral who have not given their hearts unto God, nor received the Saviour. All that are not sons and daughters, are rebels and traitors. They who have not returned unto God through Christ are still in a far country; and all that are afar off from God are charged with *riotous living*, for,

1. They have *cast off the government of God*. The Lord Jehovah is our king and governor: his dominion is over all the earth, and the inhabitants of the world

are his subjects. All live on his bounty, “and by him all things consist.” It is he that supports our lives, provides for our wants, and protects us from our enemies. We owe all things to God, and he has every right to rule over us. And we are under every possible obligation to love our Governor, to obey him in all things with delight, and to glorify his name with all our powers. It is not done.

The whole earth is *full of rebellion*. It is a riotous world. All mankind, till they are brought under the dominion of the grace of Christ, are tired of the government of God, and strive every way to shake it off. “The carnal mind is enmity against God;” and this mind is in every man: in the decent pharisee as well as in the profligate sinner, till Christ comes to dwell in their hearts by faith. It is indeed easy to see that all these try to get rid of the government of the Almighty, by such instances as these:—They are constantly opposing their *own wills* to the will of God, and think that the Lord ought to give up his will to make way for theirs. And is not this high rebellion against heaven, and a most riotous living?—God’s *management* in providence seldom pleases them. They constantly find fault with the state of things on earth, the seasons and the weather, and proudly think that he frequently errs, and they could act better.—What are all the *murmurs* that fill the world, but quarrelling with God’s government; and wishing to shake it off?—And if the Lord *corrects* them for their faults, what loud complaining of their hard treatment? Does all this appear like submission to their sovereign? The world from one

end to the other is full of *disobedience* to him who governs the earth ; and every act of disobedience is an effort to shake off his government. And can there possibly exist a more “ *riotous living* ” than this ?

2. God has made *laws* for his kingdom on earth : wise and just laws, such as never can be improved or altered, being already perfect, “ holy, just, and good.” These laws are laid down for the direction of mankind how to please God as loyal subjects of his kingdom. They are rules to direct both our hearts and lives in the ways of holiness and righteousness, and “ to guide our feet into the paths of peace.” Man’s happiness consists in his obedience to these laws : and his misery proceeds from his disobedience. God from on high commands all men every where to render obedience to the laws which he has set up, and threatens that whoso will not obey them, “ shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.”

Men answer him from the earth and say, “ Be it known unto thee, O king, that *we will not obey thy laws* which thou hast set up ; ” but we will do our own will and pleasure, and walk in the ways of our own hearts.—It is indeed very evident that sinners who have not returned to God, make very light of his holy laws. When is it that they inquire, ‘ Lord, what is thy will, that we may do it ? ’ When do they consult the divine oracle in order to know how they ought to live, and please God ?—No ; the laws which are in their *members*, the corruptions of their nature, are the laws they consult and obey. The scriptures describe them in this language : “ They are carnal, and not

spiritual, sold under sin, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind ; serving divers lusts and pleasures ; living after the flesh, and not after the spirit." —Well indeed may this be called *riotous living*, when men live unto themselves, and not unto God : following their own hearts' inclinations, and disregarding the commandments of the Most High.

3. And lastly, when sinners leave God, and shake off his government, and trample on his holy laws, they put themselves under the government of the *grand adversary* of God and man. They join the standard of Satan, to rebel and fight against their heavenly Father. —When the enemy once has the *dominion* over them, "He worketh in these children of disobedience," employs them in his service, and sends them here and there as his agents. He saith to one, "Go, and he goeth ; and to another, come, and he cometh ; and to his servant, do this, and he doeth it." —The captives of Satan, and the slaves of sin, have *no suspicion* of their being in such an evil case ; but fancy that they are the people who enjoy liberty, because "they do what they lust," not suspecting that they serve sin and Satan, and provoke the anger of the Almighty. What blinds and deludes these guilty captives ? The gratification of the flesh, and the pleasures of sin. They glide down pleasantly with the stream of their own hearts' desires and propensities, and for the time conceive of this as the highest happiness. And is not this *riotous living* ?

What can be *more riotous* than the conduct of sinners in an unregenerate state ? They have left God,

and cast off his government. They trample on his laws, and refuse to obey him. They neither love nor fear him, and feel no desire to return.—While in this far country, they are in Satan's kingdom and become his subjects and soldiers to fight against the Holy One. While they are led captive by him at his will, what can be expected from them but high rebellion against heaven?—Riotous living indeed! when men move not by the rules which their God has laid down for them to walk by, but are hurried away by their own depraved nature, and governed by their own sinful appetites.—This then is the sad history of sinners when they leave God and do not return. They revel in a far country, spend all, and die.

4. How widely different from all this is the character and conduct of those who have *returned* from this far country to their Father's house! They are mercifully delivered from the galling yoke of sin and Satan, and restored to the kingdom of salvation, and to the glorious liberty of the children of God. Sin shall no more reign over them, and Satan has lost his dominion in their hearts for ever.—On their return they have put themselves under the government and protection of their great Deliverer, who hides them in his pavilion, and defends them from all evil.—They who once were the servants of sin are now become the servants of God, whom they glorify with their souls and bodies, which are his. They can no longer live the rest of their time to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. They are dead unto sin, and can no longer live unto it. For the grace of God which bringeth salvation teacheth them

to "deny all ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." Titus ii. 12.

How much happier is it to be under the *reign of grace* than to be under the dominion of sin; to walk according to the holy laws of God than to be carried away by the base corruptions of our fallen nature? The law, the love, and the fear of the Lord are implanted in the hearts of those who have returned to the Lord their God; and this heavenly principle puts an end to their riotous living, and leads their hearts and lives in the holy ways which lead to the land of life; to the obedience of Christ; and finally, to the rest that remaineth for the people of God. Let all rioters hear and consider this, and return in haste to the God they have forsaken, submit to the happy reign of his grace, and live for ever.

IV.—THE GRIEVOUS FAMINE.

Verse 14. — *And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.*

THIS is exactly what we might expect to hear of such a prodigal son. When we see high-spirited youths breaking loose from parental authority, and casting off all restraints, they begin the road to ruin. No sooner

are these their own masters, and have means at their command, than they enter the green flowery fields of gay and expensive dissipation. There they commence their riotous living, and begin their thoughtless career of ruin. Hurried on by a passionate desire of pleasure, they banish all reflection: eagerly grasping the present gratification, and regardless of future consequences, they lavish their goods with unrestrained profusion.— When thus hurried on by their uncontrolled passions and licentious pursuits, dreaming of rivers of pleasures for years yet to come, the dark clouds gather and suddenly burst in torrents on their giddy heads: tidings arrive that their *means are all spent*. Now the dark and cloudy day is come, and their sun sets. They are not only reduced; but they have spent all their money, their health, their character, and their conscience. And now their friends, their hopes, and prospects are all vanished, and have left them to their own painful reflections, to weep and groan disconsolate in the gloomy region of black despair. Nothing now remains but the mighty famine, as the natural fruit of riotous living.

In the history of the prodigal, we see the true character and conduct of the sinner; of every sinner that has left God. We have heard already that sinners are great spend-thrifts: now we hear, “that they have spent ALL.” It would be of great advantage to us, clearly to understand this great and self-evident truth, “that all the gifts, benefits, and blessings that God bestows on graceless sinners, are things that will be spent and come to nothing.” Nothing will endure for ever but Christ, his grace and salvation. All the good

things of earth will perish with the earth;—all the talents, privileges, and opportunities which God bestoweth on Christless sinners will waste and vanish away, and be no more. It will soon be said of all that have their portion here below, “They have spent all, and the mighty famine is come.”

I.—It would be well worth our while to take a FAIR SURVEY of all things under the sun, and see how quickly they decay, perish, and disappear.—There are a vast variety of things in creation which greatly amuse the human mind, that gain man's attention, employ his talents, win his affections, and delight his heart: men in their weakness and folly live on these instead of living on God. What multitudes may truly say, “I have made gold my hope, and said to the fine gold, thou art my confidence.” And what countless hosts of the children of men have risked their eternal life for the pleasures of this lower world. But how quickly is it said of such men, “They have spent all.”

1. This may be said of a great number *in this life*, long before they leave the world. All the happiness they ever knew has forsaken them, and left them to sink into misery and pain.—Many of the gayest sons of dissipation, who appeared once the most lively and happy of the train, live till their pleasures are all spent and gone by; their means fail them to pursue their vain course any farther. Not a few can say in the midst of their days, “I have spent all,” and have nothing left. Though once they abounded in treasures; their treasures made themselves wings and fled away.—As for spiritual treasures they have none to spend,

and never had since they departed from God. In that sense they were always "poor, and blind, and naked." And now their earthly goods, of every description, are lavished away; many in early life have spent all.

2. And at the *close of life*, the poverty of the ungodly is inconceivably deep and distressing! It may be well said, of all Christless souls in the day of death, they have spent all, and have nothing.—They close their eyes on *all creation*, and shall see the sun, the earth, the sea, no more for ever. All their fine sceneries are vanished away; the last hour of mirth and pleasure is spent, and shall no more return; they are stripped of all, even the clothes they wore; and have not a friend in all creation that can yield them help or consolation. Truly they have spent all, and are poor indeed! For in one hour they bid an eternal adieu to all their vain delights, and all that is dear to them under the sun. All this they could patiently endure if they had a *Saviour* to support, protect, and comfort them; but they have no saviour, no salvation, and no refuge. They have rejected Christ, and preferred the world and sin before him: they have neglected and trifled with his great salvation, and therefore remain under condemnation, and perish in this forlorn, deserted state. And what are their *prospects* in the world eternal whither they are going? they are truly dark, dismal, and terrific! If they look up to heaven, they say, 'that country I despised, and refused the way that leads to it. It is not my country, and I shall never enter in; having no title to it, nor meetness for it, and never have laid up any treasures there.'—

Verily all that die out of Christ, “have *spent all*,” and are poor indeed; having lost both heaven and earth, and now are driven hopeless into the land of endless despair, and are ingulphed in a dark eternity!—Oh, sinners, *flee in time to the refuge*, and take shelter under the wings of mercy. “Turn ye to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope.” Hide yourselves in the clefts of the rock of ages, that you may be safe from the wrath to come; and that you may triumph in the eternal Saviour, when graceless sinners weep and lament, and perish without hope.

II.—“There arose a mighty FAMINE in that land.”

1. By this far country and land of famine, we are clearly to understand, the *state of nature* into which sin hath brought us; a state of alienation from God, and of enmity against him; a state of sin and death, of condemnation and misery. In this woful state all are born into the world, “children of wrath.” And in this condition many always continue, living, dying, and for ever. They never return from this far country, nor leave the land of famine; but abide in it and never know happiness; never reconciled to God, nor God to them.—We are all in this state of nature, till we are *born of God*, and made the children of grace. All the unregenerate; all that have not passed from death to life; yes, all that have not put off the old man, and put on Christ, are inhabitants of this far country.

2. And this far country is a land of *great famine*; a land of the deepest poverty, of wretchedness, and of ruin. It would be well if sinners took due pains to understand and consider the nature and greatness of

that famine, which always, and every where, fills the land of nature. It is a grievous famine,—a “dearth over all the world.” And this famine is in a land where a supply can never be found. We must leave this country, or perish everlastingly.—No *spiritual blessings* can ever fall to your lot while you remain in an unregenerate state. All unconverted sinners are in the world of nature, and not of grace; and there they have nothing but natural things, and not one spiritual blessing. —While men continue in the state of nature, “they are *without Christ*,” without saving grace, and without salvation. Truly the famine of this land is great indeed! Not one of the inhabitants is in a pardoned state, at peace with God, and in the way to heaven. Not one is put in possession of salvation, because they have never put on Christ, and made one with him; and without union with the Saviour, they can have no eternal life, “for there is salvation in no other.”—None of the graces and saving blessings of the *Holy Ghost* will ever fall upon sinners in their natural state. The first operation of the Holy Spirit on the souls that are saved, is to unite them to Christ, and make them partakers of the divine life in him. Prior to this union, He convinceth them of sin, guilt, and danger, to make them willing to receive a Saviour. The first saving work of the Spirit is to raise sinners from death to life, and so translate them from the state of nature into the state of grace. Men in the state of nature have not one spark of holiness or meetness for heaven. In this far country they never can have the renewing of the Holy Ghost, nor the white

robe and garments of salvation.—Here they shall never taste of the *bread of life*, nor drink of the water of life, nor have any one spiritual blessing.

No: all these are to be found in the land of life, and not in the land of death.—So great is the *poverty and barrenness* of the land of nature, that nothing but weeds, thorns, and briars grow in it. Not one of the fruits of the Spirit can ever grow in this barren soil: and none of the inhabitants of this far country have any communion with God, nor love to Christ, nor any peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. These can be enjoyed no where but in the land of life, in the kingdom of grace, and state of salvation.—Such is the *great famine* that always fills this far country, that the inhabitants have nothing but dying things that perish in the using: they have no salvation, no life eternal, no divine blessing; they are without hope, and without God in the world. This subject leads us to make the following Observations:—

Obs. 1. Sinners *proceed from sin to greater sins*. Sin is a plant of quick growth: it is a leaven that spreads fast over all the members of the body and faculties of the soul, till the whole is leavened. Sin moves on with a quick step, and every step it takes gives it additional energy and makes the next step less difficult, and more gratifying. Eve first listened to Satan, looked at the tree, coveted the fruit, put out her hand, took of it and ate it, and then gave to her husband. Her son Cain, entertained jealousy, then hated his brother, and then slew him. Judas also, loved money, turned hypocrite, and proved a traitor.

And this prodigal son likewise began his career of wickedness with forming high thoughts of himself, then grew saucy to his father, demanded his portion, then marched off into a far country, where he spent all his money in riotous living.—Is not this the manner of sinners in general? they go on from iniquity unto iniquity, and gain strength as they go on, as a stone rolling down hill gains force and motion as it proceeds. But let sinners know this;—that as they grow in wickedness, they sink in danger: as they treasure up sin, they treasure up wrath as fast: the more guilty they become, the more angry God is towards them. O transgressors, as you value the favour of God, depart from all iniquity, before iniquity becomes your ruin!

Obs. 2. We observe next, *that sin leads to sufferings*. It was the riotous living that brought on the famine: when the land was not cultivated, the harvest failed. We see how very true it is, “that what a man soweth, that shall he also reap:” “he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption:” and “he that soweth to the wind shall reap the whirlwind.” Transgressions are the seed of pain and punishment: extravagance leads to poverty; and rebellion to the prison. All the sufferings that fill the world may be traced to the sins of men:—indeed, sufferings frequently *flow out of sin* as naturally as restlessness from a fever, or pain from broken bones. Men often can read their sin in their punishment. The prodigal son could plainly see the words RIOTOUS LIVING, written in large characters on the famine which he

endured. He that groans on his couch under the gnawing pain or torturing agony of the gout, well remembers his former intemperance and feastings, his drunkenness and gluttony. What fine constitutions have been undermined, enfeebled, and utterly ruined, by midnight revels, licentious conduct, and riotous living! Many gamble away their estates, and their children beg their bread. Thousands of poor families pine for want of bread, owing to the intemperance of parents at the tap-house. What fills our jails, and for the most part our hospitals too, but riotous living? We can safely say of most of the sufferings that fill the earth, that they flow out of sin as naturally as stench from the dunghill; or bitter streams from a bitter fountain.—And where sufferings and pain are not the natural fruits of transgressions, they are sent as *punishment* from God for them; as the plagues on Pharaoh, the curse on Ham, or the leprosy on Gehazi.—But with regard to those who shall inherit glory, God makes use of punishment as the *means of mercy*, as in the case of Job, he strips him of all that he may give him much more. He sells Joseph as a slave, and leads him through the prison to be governor of Egypt. And the mighty famine in the far country shall send the prodigal son home to his father's house. So that, “In the midst of judgment God remembereth mercy.” Many are the *benefits* which the men of grace derive from the afflictions of this life: they keep them back from sin, and drive them more to Christ. This is the furnace which God hath in Zion to purify his people; and here they learn many a useful lesson

which either they would not, or could not, learn any where else but under the smarting rod : “ Tribulation worketh patience ; and patience, experience ; and experience, hope.” “ When they are tried, they shall come forth as gold.” So then, all the sufferings of this life are either the natural fruits of sin, or judgment from God on the wicked for their sins, or corrections to benefit the righteous.

Obs. 3. This mighty famine is sent on purpose to *drive out* the inhabitants of that far country, and to send them home to God their Father ; to convince sinners that the land of sin is the land of death ; and to prevail on them to come into the land of life. Sinners, generally, take no warning of their danger, nor feel their need of God, till they become great sufferers : while they bask in the sunshine of prosperity they, like Jeshurun, wax fat and kick. God sends many messengers after them to call them home, and they will not hear : but, if Pharaoh will not hear Moses, he shall soon hear the plagues which God sends to speak to him. Many sleep so fast in sin, or are so intent on the ways of the flesh, that they hear neither the thunders of Sinai, nor the melodies of Sion : yet God can speak in a voice that will arrest their attention, and make their flesh to tremble. He has got the pestilence, the famine, and the sword, as his servants at command. He sends these to snatch their wives from their bosom, or slay their first-born. Here all their plans and projects are disconcerted ; their fine pictures are dashed to pieces ; and their hopes perish. ‘ Will you hear me now ? ’ saith the voice

from heaven : they answer, for the first time, " Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth." " In the day of adversity they consider," and cry out, " Wherefore hath this happened unto us ?" " We are in prison and cannot come out." Where shall we find a deliverer? The earth cannot furnish us, let us turn our eyes to heaven.—It is the mighty famine that drives home the prodigal.

Obs. 4. Man naturally *shuns and dreads* the calamities and afflictions of this life ; but our God and Father sees it necessary to send them. And under his wise and gracious management, the things which men dreaded most have proved their greatest blessings : prevailed on them to come to the Saviour for salvation and deliverance from danger and trouble, when all other means had failed. Bartimeus shall be made blind that he may be made to cry, " Son of David have mercy on me." A young woman of Canaan shall be possessed with the Devil to bring her afflicted mother to Jesus, and to pray earnestly, " Lord, help me." Absalom could not bring Joab to speak to him till he set his corn-field on fire. Many will not come to God, though often invited, till he fires them out of their dwellings. " He puts affliction on their loins," till they are forced " to cry unto the Lord in their trouble." He sends an Elijah to destroy their false gods, that they may worship the true God.—When great troubles come, men run to their idols for help, and cry in their distress, " O Baal, hear us ;" O world, deliver us ! " And when there is neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any to regard," some begin to

cry with Elijah, "Hear thou me, O Lord, hear me."—But some *harden* their hearts that they will not hear the voice of judgment nor of mercy. Of these the Lord saith, "I have called, and ye refused:" "He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy," Prov. xxix. 1. The mighty famine itself will not drive all out of the far country; but they will stay in spite of it, and die there.

III. Of this prodigal it is said, that "HE BEGAN TO BE IN WANT." When he was full and in the height of his mad career, he thought nothing of poverty and want. But it is come at an hour he looked not for it; and he meets it just as a culprit meets the constable that apprehends him to take him to prison. He now finds the old adage true, that 'wilful waste brings to woful want.' A riotous liver has but a short way to travel into the land of poverty and distress; and the faster he drives, the sooner he comes to his journey's end.—But in what sense is this true of those sinners that God arrests in their career of wickedness, and begins to prepare the way to restore them to himself?

1. How do they begin to be in want? In numerous instances, the Lord *strips* them of the means to gratify their desires, appetites, and inclinations any longer. When they drive on furiously, the Lord all of a sudden meets them in some narrow passage and stops them, as the Angel stopped Balaam, when on his way to curse Israel. When the inhabitants of Sodom were most determined on their gratification, "the Lord struck them with blindness, that they wearied them-

selves to find the door." So does God frequently now deprive sinners at once of the power to proceed in their sinful courses. Some dark cloud overshadows their land of delights, and their day is turned into night. It may be their health and strength fail them; their friends forsake them; their property is wasted; their character ruined; and their name despised. Now they sink into despondency and cry, "They have taken away my gods, and what have I more?" My gourd is withered, and I do well to be angry even unto death. Their hearts are still on the vain delights and sinful pleasures which they once enjoyed, but now have fled away: "they follow hard after their lovers, but cannot overtake them:" they wander from place to place, and go from company to company, and inquire every where, 'Are my former pleasures and mirth here?' and every thing under the sun answers them, 'NO.' So they begin to be in want:—in want of rest, peace, and pleasure; in want of all enjoyments, or any cheering prospects; the world denies them any more favours, and they know not where to go, for hitherto they are perfect strangers to any higher pleasures, and have no knowledge of the Saviour.

What can be a more *forlorn condition* than that poor sinners are in, when the world turns into darkness, and God does not shine, nor speak peace unto them? They are filled with dread and trembling: they attempt to flee; but they know of no refuge. Into such a dismal state multitudes of the most high-spirited and daring sinners are gradually reduced; and, in some instances, are brought down from their

high towers to the dark dungeon in a moment, as with a whirlwind. When Belshazzar with his thousand lords, wives, and concubines, were at the height of their mirth, in the midst of their joyous feast; and at the moment they were profaning the sacred vessels of God's temple, by drinking their wine in them, and praising their gods of gold, of silver, and of brass; the mysterious hand-writing on the wall put an end to their mirth in a moment, and filled every heart with terror and consternation, till their knees smote one against another. So, from the midst of their affluence, they come down in a moment, and "they begin to be in want."

2. Wherever the Holy Ghost begins his preparatory work for effectual conversion, he always brings sinners under a *due sense* of their poverty and wants.—When the Holy Ghost actually *converts* the sinner, he unites him to Christ; gives him life eternal; seals him unto the day of redemption; and none shall be able to separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus. All that pass from death to life shall not come into condemnation; but are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation:—Whom the Lord justifieth, he also glorifieth. But there are operations of the Spirit on the *unregenerate*, which may come short of salvation. We read of some being enlightened, that taste of the heavenly gift, are made partakers of the Holy Ghost, that taste of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come; and after all fall away and die. Heb. vi. This, with other scriptures, plainly shew that the unconverted have some

influences from the Holy Spirit. He strives with them, stands at their door and knocks, and convinceth them of sin, before they are brought to conversion and a state of salvation.

This possibly is the case of the prodigal at the present stage of his progress, when he "begins to be in want." He is now convinced of the *emptiness and vanity* of all things under the sun. He tried various ways of happiness, and met with nothing better than disappointment in them all. He repeated the trial again and again, in hopes of succeeding by perseverance; but every new attempt increased his disappointment; till at last he arrived at this true conclusion, "All things under the sun are vanity and vexation of spirit." Now in reviewing the *ways he travelled*, the objects he pursued, and the hopes he entertained in those days of vanity, he is filled with astonishment and confusion at his own wickedness and folly. He calls himself the chief of sinners, and the most deluded of men,—that he ever expected to find rest in the vanishing shadows of time, or happiness in things that have no happiness in themselves. His language now is this, 'I am convinced, upon a fair trial, that this world has nothing to make me happy, or to save me from misery: all things here are passing away, but I shall always live.' This kind of conviction lessens the sinner's attachment to earthly things, cools his desires, and weans his soul from the earth. When all his earthly felicity has fled and forsaken him, and continuing a stranger to better things, "he begins to be in want."

3. He wants something which he *has not, but does not know what he wants*. He is restless and unhappy, seeking rest, but finding none. All his former pleasures have forsaken him, and he has none in the room of them. Under this privation he feels within him an empty void, but knows not where to find a supply. In his distress, he goes again, and tries what those pleasures, which once highly delighted him, can do for him now, under his painful wants. He enters his former circles, assumes an air of gaiety, and acts his part in the wild whims and frolics of his companions, and strives to be merry; but his awakened conscience forbids it, and reminds him, at every step he takes, that this is the road to ruin. Alarmed with the fear of death and judgment, he flees and retires again into solitude, and there sinks in sadness and sorrow. His wants press hard upon his mind; gloom and despondency fill his soul; he knows not what to do, nor where to go; for at this stage of his pilgrimage he is an utter stranger to Christ and his salvation.—All that is yet done in his soul is but the preparatory work of the new Creator. God is pulling down what stands in the sinner's way to the Saviour. The Holy Ghost convinceth him of sin and ruin; strips him of self-righteousness and self-confidence; gives him to feel that he is poor, and blind, and naked, guilty and condemned. Under these convictions, he sensibly feels that he is in WANT.—And *great* indeed are the wants of all Christless sinners. For what have they in their unregenerate state? They have no grace, and no God; no Saviour, and no salvation; no eternal life, no right to heaven,

nor meetness for it.—Let those sinners who feel conviction that this is their own case, take *courage*, for they are “not far from the kingdom of heaven.” The Spirit of God is preparing them to receive the salvation that is in Christ Jesus.

V.—THE WILLING SLAVE.

Ver. 15, 16.—*And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.*

WE are now come to that stage of the prodigal's pilgrimage where we may learn these humiliating lessons,—That sinners are extremely *backward* to return home to their forsaken God; that they have the greatest aversion to come again to their Father's house; and that they leave this far country with the greatest reluctance—They will have recourse to every *mean shift*, and submit to the lowest drudgery, and suffer the greatest hardship rather than return.—But we see that all their plans and policies *utterly fail them*: they meet with nothing but disappointment at every turn, until they turn to God, and to this they have the strongest aversion, and would rather perish where they are.

I. It is indeed with the STRONGEST RELUCTANCE

that sinners leave this far country. While sin reigns in their mortal body they have the greatest aversion to return home to God.

1. How *strange*, how marvellous, how unaccountable is this conduct in sinners, who must inevitably perish everlastingly except they return in heart and in truth to the God of salvation.—Can criminals who are condemned and banished from the presence of God into the enemy's country, be backward to accept of liberty; feel aversion to return, and receive their pardon, and be reconciled to their God and Father? Can sinners, who lie under the tremendous sentence of eternal death, be backward to return to their offended God, that they may obtain remission of sins, and peace with heaven? Can they who dwell in Satan's kingdom, where the wrath of God abideth on them, feel reluctant to come into the kingdom of salvation and be made partakers of spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus?—How unaccountable it is, that perishing sinners are so loath to leave the land of death and come to the land of life! They hug the chains that bind them down in the enemy's country, and are most backward to accept of the glorious liberty which Christ bestows on the subjects of his kingdom. They love to dwell in the darkness of sin and death, rather than come into the light of life. The children of darkness hate the light, and will not come unto the light, lest their deeds should be made manifest.—Strange indeed, that lost sinners should feel such aversion to come to the Saviour, who alone can deliver them from death and hell! While they remain in this far country, they

are exposed to every danger, and have no defence, yet refuse to come to the refuge which God hath provided, and where alone safety can be found.

Here pause for a moment,—And think first of all what a *God he is* whom sinners have forsaken, and to whom they are all so reluctant to return. He is the God of salvation, the God of all grace, and the Father of mercies: “God is love.”—Next think *what sinners are without God*. They are in a wretched state, and in the most deplorable condition. They are moving on through time under an enormous load of guilt, and drawing fast on towards the torments of eternity.—And think once more what *felicity and glory* all returning sinners find in God their Saviour. They receive eternal life; are made partakers of the great salvation; made sons of God and co-heirs with Christ; and are finally exalted to the throne of heaven, to be for ever with the Lord.

Now if a *Herald* was sent down from heaven, and commissioned to go through the whole earth and proclaim only once to the fallen race of Adam these tidings of salvation through grace, one would expect that the whole world would gladly and joyfully embrace the offered salvation; that they would all flow into Zion by thousands and millions, and that none would remain in that distant land to perish everlastingly. But melancholy to relate, few accept of the salvation of God and return to their Father's house. The great mass of mankind prefer staying in the far country, and ruin their souls for ever.

2. Sinners are so far from being willing, that they

have the greatest AVERSION to come home to God. They would rather go any where else; and will run the risk of losing all the felicity that can be enjoyed in heaven, and suffer all the torments which hell can inflict, rather than come away from the land of sin and death, and return to the kingdom of life and holiness. Of this strong aversion, they give us the most abundant proofs, such as these :

The inhabitants of this far country are frequently very *unhappy and miserable* where they are, and yet will not come out and return to the Lord their God. Here they can enjoy nothing but what the world can give, and very often the world itself frowns on them, and deprives them of their chief delights. Their plans and projects are broken down; their hopes and prospects vanish; all around is darkness; and their spirits sink into a state of despondency and hopeless gloom. Here they become self-tormentors, weary of life, yet dreading death, and have no cheering hopes of heaven. Yet even now they will not return to God, though he offers them a kingdom of joy and endless rest. A strong proof this of their aversion to God, and the enmity of their hearts against holiness.

Another proof of this strong aversion to return to God we find in those who withstand all the *invitations, offers, promises, and allurements* of the glorious gospel of the blessed God.—A bleeding Redeemer shews them his wounds, and *invites* them to partake of all the blessings and felicity that his flowing blood could purchase. The eternal Father melts over their miseries, and affectionately invites them to return to his house, and to

abide there for ever. Yes, the King of kings invites them to his palace in the heavens, and to share with him all the joys and triumphs of eternity. But to all these kind invitations they turn a deaf ear.—The glorious Saviour, in order to prevail on their reluctant hearts to comply with his gracious invitations, makes them the greatest *offers* that he can possibly ever make to any beings. He offereth them a glorious and eternal salvation; the highest life, and that for ever; unsearchable riches of grace, and exceeding great and eternal weight of glory. What more has God to give? what more can man desire? Yet few of the inhabitants of this far country are prevailed with to accept of these inestimable mercies.—And to those that will accept his offers, he makes exceeding great and precious *promises*; promises of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. To go up to the very highest, and to make all secure, he engageth by an everlasting covenant that he will be their God, and that they shall be his people. This promise crowns all, includes all, and secures all blessings for evermore.—Surely there is enough here to *allure* the hearts of all sinners to the God of grace. Who can withstand such gracious invitations? who can reject such great offers from the God of glory? and who but must be overcome and allured home to God by promises that contain all riches of grace and glory, and rivers of pleasure for evermore. But marvellous to relate, all, *all are too little* to win the hearts of sinners; to slay their enmity against God, and to prevail on them to leave the far country and return to God.—Then I ask, *how strong*

is that aversion of sinners to the Lord, where such powerful motives fail to persuade them!!!

Their strong aversion is clearly seen in various other ways—Their *hatred to the religion of Christ* shews it. Though this alone can save sinners, yet you cannot mention this religion in their hearing without giving offence. It is cant; it is hypocrisy; it is fit only for the ignorant vulgar.—When the alluring voice of the gospel wins upon some of the inhabitants of the far country, and prevails with them to *come out* and begin the way to Zion, they who stay behind begin to jeer, revile, and scorn them as deluded fools, and do all they can to bring them back to the land of death. And what do they say of those that determine to go forward? They say that they are quite lost to society; greatly to be pitied, and deserve to be despised.—And what, but the strong aversion of a blind world towards God, has caused all the *persecutions and cruelty* shewn to his saints? The ground of the quarrel is because they leave the far country to go home to their Father's house. By these and other instances we see the strong aversion of sinners to return to God, and accept of his salvation.

How clearly is this reluctance and aversion seen in the conduct of the *prodigal son*! When he had spent all and reduced himself to extreme poverty, yet he has no thoughts of returning home. Then the mighty famine comes on, he has nothing to eat, and his life is in danger, yet feels the strongest reluctance to leave this far country. He tries every mean shift, and will endure the greatest hardship; he will even serve the

cruellest master; and put up with the meanest fare, rather than return to God his Father.

3. *Why* all this reluctance to leave the land of death and aversion to the land of life? This, at first view, appears unaccountable; for it is every way the highest interest of perishing sinners to leave this far country and return home to God: and yet strange to tell, few, comparatively, are prevailed with to come away; they had rather pine with hunger, and die where they are, than come to the kingdom of salvation. How is this to be accounted for?

In the first place, they *believe nothing* of what they hear of the *country where they live*. They are often warned that it is an enemy's land, and that none but enemies to the King of Sion will continue in it. And they are also warned that no true happiness can ever be enjoyed here; and that vengeance from heaven will inevitably fall on them all at last. They laugh at this, and think it is only the idle cant of enthusiasts. O, say they, this is a very fine country to live in, it is the land of liberty; a person may here do just what he likes, and nobody is to call him to account. So they believe nothing of what they hear against the country where they live.—Neither do they believe a word of what they hear of the *Redeemer's kingdom*. The gospel gives a beautiful description of the glory and grandeur of that kingdom, and of the infinite privileges and felicity of its inhabitants. They hear that all the subjects of King Jesus are made sons and daughters of God Almighty; that they shall live for ever, and reign with Christ in glory eternal: But they believe

nothing of all this. Did they believe these glad tidings indeed, it would be impossible to keep them a day longer in the enemy's kingdom.

Besides their want of faith, they find this far country every way *suitable to their sinful inclinations*.—Here they are in their natural element, as much as the fish is so in the water, or the swine in the mud. All the happiness they know, or desire to experience, is the gratification of their various sinful propensities, and to live after the flesh. In this distant land they find abundance of food for their lusts, and plenty of companions to keep them in countenance. This country, therefore, suits their taste and turn of mind so exactly, that they wish to stay here, and never depart.—And as to the *land of life, and kingdom of grace*, they dread the thought of going there, knowing very well, that it is required of all the subjects of the Saviour, to depart from iniquity, and serve the living God: to mortify their evil affections, to crucify the flesh, to die unto sin, and to live godly in Christ Jesus. All this they exceedingly dislike, and dread entering into the country where this self-denial, and holy exercises are required. They know that there is nothing in the Redeemer's kingdom that would agree with their taste, or gratify their principle; therefore they feel the strongest aversion to go there. But in the kingdom of sin, they find things suitable to their taste and delight; and on this account they abide in it.

But the grand cause of this strong aversion towards Christ and his kingdom is, the *deep rooted enmity* of the carnal mind against God, and all holiness. Sin-

ners are not only careless and indifferent about returning to the Lord ; but more, they dread to be near unto him. But why so?—Because the very nature of sin is enmity and hatred against God. It is therefore natural to shun what they hate. And so strong is this enmity, that they quarrel with God for setting up his government over them ; for controlling their actions, and restraining their wickedness ; and for threatening to punish them as transgressors. They wish to sin without restriction or control, and to go without punishment ; therefore they hate the government of God. So inveterate is the enmity of the carnal mind against a holy God, that nothing short of omnipotent grace can subdue it.

II. When sinners are awakened by the Holy Ghost, and brought under DEEP CONVICTION OF SIN, which generally is done in suffering times, they now begin to think of their ruined state, and imminent danger ; and to tremble for fear of judgment.—But even now they are very *unwilling* to return home to their Father's house. They will try every artful policy, every mean shift, and submit to every hardship, rather than seek help of God and come to the land of life. What did this prodigal do when the mighty famine came, and reduced him to want and wretchedness ? Did he get up and begin the way home to his father ? No, not so.

1. But he went and joined himself to a CITIZEN of that country. That is, to Satan, who dwells always and for ever in the regions of sin. All sinners in the state of nature are in the same country with the prince

of darkness. Even those that are afterwards the citizens of the new Jerusalem, are for a time in the same country with apostate angels, and under their dominion; but these, at their conversion, are delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Col. i. 13. In their unconverted state, they join themselves to the grand adversary in rebellion against heaven: they side with Satan against God; and agree to disobey his laws, and to fight against his kingdom.—They put themselves under the dominion of the god of this world, and become his servants: they that forsake God are sure to have a hard master to serve. The prince of darkness saith to his subjects, Harden your hearts against the Almighty, and they do so; Open your mouths against heaven, and they lie and swear, and blaspheme; Shut your eyes and ears against all that the Lord saith or doeth, and they close their eyes that they cannot see, and their ears that they cannot hear; Run away from the temple, from the works and the ways of the Lord; they obey their master and depart farther and farther from God. Sinners have a cruel master, they are ashamed to own him, yet will serve him faithfully.

2. “And he sent him into his *fields to feed swine.*” As he has entered the service of such a hard master, he shall have a *hard and mean service*; and be made a slave, a drudge, and be very poorly paid at last. Yet, strange to tell, a great number of reputed wise men, learned men, and men in eminent stations, even the nobles of this world, will in crowds enter as readily

into the service of the prince of darkness, as the lowest and most ignorant of the people. They volunteer their services to the god of this world, and he sends them into his fields to feed swine.

Satan has *many fields* to employ his servants in, for his country is very extensive; he has all the wide regions of sin under his dominion; and these regions are as wide as earth and hell put together. In these territories he has as many fields as there are ways of sinning; but they are all open fields, not at all enclosed, so that his subjects may wander as far as they please, and work in as many fields as they like. Provided they serve him, he does not care where. It would be very difficult to find a name for all the fields within the dominion of the prince of darkness. Some of them are these: the fields of ignorance, of infidelity and impiety; the fields of vanity, of dissipation, and carnal mirth; the fields of avarice, of cheating, lying, and swearing; the fields of hypocrisy, error, and delusion; the fields of ambition, jealousy, hatred, and revenge; the fields of debauchery, drunkenness, and revellings, with hundreds and thousands more.

All the *liberty* which Satan allows his subjects is to choose in what fields they will work. And it is a little singular, that men of all ranks and stations in life, frequently fix on the same fields; so that you will find some of the highest, and some of the lowest, mixed and blended together in one and the same field, working together for their one hard and cruel master. Different indeed in apparel, but one in morals; pursuing the same gratification and indulgences.—As these are

workers together in the same fields, is it not a matter, not of mere conjecture, but of absolute certainty, that these shall, in the last day, be bound together in bundles to be burnt? for so hath God determined.

3. "And he sent him into his fields *to feed swine.*" As he has chosen so bad a master, he shall have very *mean employment*. But he will submit to any thing rather than returning home; he will try every way, and submit to the greatest privation and hardship before he is made willing to go back to his Father's house.—Yes, he will go at Satan's orders to feed swine before he can be prevailed upon to submit to his Father's government.

He will go and join *sinner*s who have made themselves vile as the swine. No animal so filthy and vile as swine, which would rather be in the puddle than in a palace; and yet to these unclean animals are vile sinners frequently compared in Scripture, because of their filthiness and brutishness. They are said to be like the brute beasts that have no understanding, because they are not guided by reason and judgment; but by their unruly passions and inclinations, and act as if they had no more understanding than the beasts of the forest. Reason is what gives man his superiority over the beasts that perish; and when men give up their understanding, and follow their appetites and sinful desires, they sink on a level with the brutes.

Or, by the swine he is sent to feed, we may fairly understand the herd of *corruptions* that dwell in his own heart and nature. All these are more noisy than swine for gratification. Some of the works of the flesh

are these: "Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulation, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like. - They who do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Gal. v. 19—21. See also 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. and Rom. viii. 6, 7, 13.

Such then is the *state and condition* of sinners out of Christ. They are the servants of Satan, who leads them captive at his will; they have the most degraded employment, serving divers lusts, and base corruptions, and they are very poorly paid at last for all their vile drudgery. "The wages of sin is death, and they that live after the flesh shall die." There is no such cruel bondage and degraded slavery, as what the servants of sin endure. The children of Israel were in an evil case when bondmen in the iron furnace, and made slaves in the brick-kilns. But the children of men who were created after God's image, and made little lower than the angels, are infinitely more degraded when made captives to Satan and servants of sin.

4. They try to *fill their bellies* with the husks which the swine do eat, and no man giveth unto them. The souls of men hunger and thirst after happiness, rest, and satisfaction. Men try a vast variety of ways and means to obtain this happiness and enjoyment; but all things fail them: their hunger is never satisfied, and their souls find no rest till they truly turn to God the Saviour, and rest in his finished salvation. This the Psalmist well knew when he said, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul."—All things short of the salvation of

God are *husks* which the swine do eat, and not bread. They are all vanities, that fade and die ; empty cisterns that can hold no water. They are not suitable to the soul ; nor what can relieve the sinner any more than music to the dying man. The soul lives for ever, but all sinful gratifications, and all things under the sun die away with time.

It may, indeed, be truly said, that *no man giveth unto him husks* enough to fill his belly. The more he eats, the more he hungers. By feeding his corruptions, he nourishes his diseases and weakens his constitution. The soul is never satisfied by drinking of the muddy waters of earth ; “ He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again.” The more he drinks, the more intense his thirst.—“ No man giveth unto him.” When sinners forsake God, God soon makes all things to forsake them ; nothing shall satisfy them, and all things shall be made to torment them. They may for a little while find gratification, and count themselves happy. But soon, very soon, all bid them eternal adieu ! Then they are left in a forlorn state, to bewail their folly in going after vain gods, which cannot help nor deliver them. When men forsake God, nothing in all creation can supply their wants.—So then, all things are husks till you come to feed on the bread of life ; and these husks can never nourish the soul and make it happy. All sinful pleasures and delights—all riches and earthly things—all false doctrines, and false professions—all are empty husks which delude the soul, and destroy the sinner.

Let the sinner believe this obvious truth : Happiness

can no where be found but *in God alone* ; depart from him, and you will soon be as restless as Cain. The dove that went out of the ark found no rest till it returned to the ark again ; the soul that leaves God may rove through the whole earth seeking rest and felicity, but shall find none until it returns again to God. Strange that there should be such backwardness to return to him, who alone can make man happy. When God created the heavens and the earth with all their hosts, he was not satisfied, and could not rest till he made man in his own likeness, to crown the whole : then he rested from all his works. And can you rest till you find God as your portion and inheritance, your dwelling place, and exceeding joy ?

They who *return* unto the Lord with all their hearts and with all their souls, find every thing in God to make them truly happy and blessed, and to yield them eternal rest and joy. When they come to live on God, they find that they have all things ; for in Christ all fulness dwells. And they have their constant supply out of this inexhaustible fulness, till they often cry exulting, “ Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee ; ” “ When I awake up in thy likeness I shall be satisfied with it ; ” “ for in thy presence is fulness of joy ; at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.” All that cordially believe this, will inevitably return unto the Lord their God.

VI.—THE SOLEMN PAUSE.

Ver. 17.—*And when he came to himself, he said, how many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger.*

THE prodigal son is now arrived at a very peculiar period of his history. Till now he drove on furiously in his mad career, determined on his sinful indulgences, and regardless of consequences. But, at a moment when he least expected, *he is stopped*. His attention is arrested, his heart is alarmed, and his spirits sink into dark despondency. He now drinks the wine of astonishment, all his pleasures forsake him in one day, his courage is turned to cowardice, his flattering hopes are vanished like vain shadows. The days of darkness are come. He *stands still*, and knows not which way to move, nor what to do. If he looks forward to the paths of sin, he sees nothing in that direction but misery and ruin : and if he turns to look towards his Father's house, shame and sorrow, guilt and fear, fill his heart. He stands trembling, pensive, lost in thought, and mutters to himself in solitude, ‘ What is to become of a wretch like me ? whither shall I flee ? Where can such an offender find a refuge or a friend ? and in what country can a weary soul like mine find rest ? ’ This is the grand turning point : he stands between life and death. “ He comes to himself.”

I. Till now he was in a state of MORAL MADNESS.

1. When you mark the manners of men in their

natural and careless state, and see how they *act*, what they delight in, covet, and pursue, you must confess that they act as irrational a part in spiritual concerns as lunatics do in temporal affairs.—Graceless sinners are thoughtless and careless about their great and eternal interest. Their thoughts and affections are so buried in the affairs of a dying world, till the exceeding great and eternal weight of glory is forgotten. What madness is this !—They also *forfeit* their highest blessings with unconcern. Were you to take from them their earthly comforts, their wealth, their estates, and their character, they would soon resist you ; but they will offer no resistance to their own corruptions, which rob them of the great salvation, and all the spiritual blessings that are in Christ Jesus. Does not this appear like insanity ?—Graceless sinners *reject* the greatest *offers* which Christ can make them, such as admission into the kingdom of salvation, adoption into the family of God, and meetness for eternal glory. They reject the Saviour himself, and all that he purchased with his precious blood. And is not this madness of the most ruinous kind !—Sinners that continue to serve sin, plainly prove the insanity of their hearts. Their concerns are infinite and for eternity, yet they neglect them, and mind only earthly things ; they prefer earth to heaven, and sell their souls and salvation for a momentary gratification of the flesh. They rebel against the Almighty, and refuse submission to the government of his grace. What madness so fatal as this !—Were you to see men so intent on their games and their pleasures, as to refuse quitting the house on fire over their

heads ; or bartering their estates for waste paper ; in that case you would say, surely these men must be out of their senses. And what must you think of those that are so intent on their carnal pleasures and worldly pursuits, as to neglect so great a salvation, and forfeit the inheritance of the saints in light, for shadows that vanish away. Such conduct plainly proves their moral insanity, in the court of divine justice, and soon shall their galling bands be laid on, never to be loosed.

2. One of the leading marks of insanity is to make very *high professions, and extravagant claims*. Madmen frequently fancy they are kings and emperors, and that all the wisdom and wealth of the world belong to them. What then shall we think of the airy generation of *young men* who live in the whirlwind, and tossed about with every blast of temptation. Their profession and their practice are dreadfully at variance. Their profession is very high, and their practice low. They profess what angels cannot do, and practice what devils cannot exceed. They profess that they are **CHRISTIANS** : which is the very same as to say, ‘ We are the disciples and followers, the servants and soldiers of the Lord Jesus. We live on Christ and live unto Christ ; we depart from all iniquity, and practice holiness in the fear of the Lord ; we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and prepare to meet our God, and be ready for eternity.’ All this and much more every one professes by calling himself a Christian. But do the *lives* of our gay and dissipated young men correspond with this high profession ? Yes, as correctly as light and darkness agree. They are

just as consistent as Satan is, when he professes to be an angel of light. How do graceless young men *live*, what do they pursue, and where do they seek their happiness? Not in God, "He is not in all their thoughts:" not in the holy ways of religion, these they shun and despise: not in mortifying the flesh and its affections and lusts; "but in living after the flesh" and "making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."

Verily the *youth of this generation*, for the most part, walk in a vain shadow and disquiet themselves in vain, pursuing eagerly what can never satisfy, and drinking streams of pleasures that will quickly turn into gall and wormwood. Their life is madness. They break every band; they banish all reflection; they scorn reproof, and despise religion. In order to be free from the restraints and lashes of their own consciences, they say in their hearts, "there is no God," and religion is an evil device to embitter our pleasures.' This they call *liberty*, and when they enjoy it they give full vent to all their inclinations, appetites, and desires; they deny themselves nothing that money can purchase or the flesh enjoy. They live in luxury, allow intemperance, run into all excess of riot, and revel in iniquity. Mirth and laughter, wine and women, and midnight revels, constitute all the heaven they know or ever wish to find. To enjoy these pleasures they will encompass sea and land, waste their fortunes and their health, and even risk their very lives, and forfeit their salvation for ever. So determined are they upon the enjoyment of their gratifications, that they will not listen to the counsel of men, nor the threatenings of their God. In truth, they live

as if there were no hell to shun, no heaven to find, no soul to save, nor God to serve. What impartial jury in the world, that deliberated on the case of these self-murderers, but would give in their verdict—LUNACY?

3. And what does the conduct of this conceited young *prodigal* before us declare? What can be more rash and presumptuous, more wild and hazardous, than the line of conduct he adopts.—He leaves God in hopes of finding some better friend; departs from his father's house in expectation of some better accommodations; he tries to improve his condition by wandering from his true rest:—and when he comes into straits and difficulties, instead of returning home and throwing himself on the mercy of his injured and offended father, he goes and joins his greatest adversary, submits to the vilest drudgery, and endures the most painful privations, rather than return home, where all kindness and plenty were to be found. Who that observes this irrational and outrageous conduct, but will readily pronounce him devoid of understanding. The same may be truly said of all the sinners on earth, who depart from God, and refuse to return. They are in a state of moral madness; not guided by reason, nor interest; but hurried away by the passions and inclinations of their depraved nature.

II. But the prodigal son is now COME TO HIMSELF; i. e. to his right senses.

1. He never before gave himself the *trouble of thinking*; but followed the bent of his nature, and the inclination of his own heart. Gratification was all he sought for; without once considering whether his

choice would be injurious or beneficial to him.—And is not this the manner of men in general?—Acting without thinking: at least, without inquiring what is *right* in the sight of God, and what will truly benefit the soul. To banish reflection, and to set reason aside, is one of the fruits of the fall. God created man a thinking being; and in the proper use of his reason his happiness greatly consisted. But now reason is set aside, and the carnal mind takes the throne. Reason has lost the government, and a host of usurpers, such as Pride, Selfishness, and Passion, govern the man.—And so things continue with every child of man till the heart is created anew, and the faculties of his soul restored to their proper order and exercise; then the wheels move right again.

2. Now the thoughtless sinner begins to THINK seriously. When the Spirit of God begins his new creation in the soul, he sobers the mind, and makes the man thoughtful. He is made first to consider his ways, and see his danger, and then he turns unto the Lord. It is in serious thinking that life eternal commences. So long as Satan can contrive to keep sinners thoughtless and unconcerned, he has them fast in his strongest chains. But when the Holy Ghost comes and brings the sinner into proper reflection, that sinner cannot be long before he asserts his liberty. This the enemy well knows, and therefore strives with all his skill to keep sinners from close thinking and self-examination. In this he prevails to an alarming degree. Multitudes never awake, but die in sleep, and perish in thoughtlessness.—That men do not think is

very evident. They have souls that must live for ever, yet will not so much as inquire where they are to have their eternal home. They must soon put on immortality, but contrive to forget this by minding earthly things. Their soul, their heaven, and their God are lost; and yet they can laugh and sing on the brink of a dark eternity. What thoughtlessness is this!

Nothing under heaven is so *unaccountable* as to see lost sinners travelling to eternity with a quiet conscience and a thoughtless mind. Sin is a powerful opiate to the soul, and keeps the sinner quiet in the most hopeless state. To live without thinking is the high road to ruin. Without close meditation, there will be no self-examination nor self-knowledge: and while men are ignorant of their lost condition, they will never seek the salvation of God. In their darkness they cry, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace;" and, like the dead professors of Laodicea, say, "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that they are wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Rev. iii. 17.

This prodigal's attention is at last arrested. He is now full of deep thought and *serious reflection*. He retires into solitude, to converse with his own heart, and to think upon God. He is solemn, serious, and lost in thought, and saith within himself, 'What am I? Where have I been? What have I been doing? What will become of me? I have a soul of immense value, which is formed for eternity. This soul I have abused, polluted, and ruined: neglected its best inte-

rest, loaded it with guilt, and fitted it for destruction. And now what is my hope and prospect? If I look up to heaven, I see a heaven that I have forfeited, and a God that I have provoked to anger: If I look down to hell, I behold torments that I justly deserve: If I look to the world, I see nothing there but an empty void, and darkness brooding over it: and if I look to myself, I tremble as a guilty culprit, left friendless to perish in his iniquity unpitied.' Such are the first solemn reflections of an awakened sinner.

All must be brought to *penitential* reflection, or never see life. Nothing is so difficult as to bring sinners to serious thinking. They are like bankrupts, afraid of examining their accounts. But forgetting an eternal hell is not the way to escape it. The right employment of the thoughts is of infinite consequence to man: on this, happiness or misery, eternal gain or loss, life or death, greatly depend.—Then let every man take heed how he employs his thoughts. There are mean, worthless, and injurious subjects in abundance within our reach: there are also before us, grand, glorious, and eternal subjects.—Why not choose these, as materials for thinking, in preference of the grovelling, dying, and polluting things of the flesh? The soul plainly tells its state by its choice of subjects for habitual meditation. Every creature naturally flees to its own natural element. So does every mind naturally and habitually think on those things that agree with the reigning principle of the heart. The thoughts of a worldly soul flow towards the world: the carnal mind goes to carnal things:—and where the soul is spiritual,

its thoughts must be also spiritual. The general current of my thoughts, and the subjects I prefer to think upon, form the best clue to judge of the state of my heart : for it is out of the abundance of the heart that these streams flow.—Say what you will, man will never think with real seriousness on his everlasting concerns, till he, like the prodigal, “ comes to himself ” by the operations of the Holy Ghost.

III.—When the prodigal is brought to serious reflection, the SUBJECTS which fill his whole soul, are these two. The happiness of those who enjoy such abundance in his father's house, and his own starving condition in a distant land. With deep agony of mind he exclaims, “ How many hired servants of my Father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger ! ”—God useth these two things to bring his children home, miseries to drive and mercies to draw them. They are made to feel their wants, and to see the rich provisions in their father's house. Sufferings make them willing to accept help from God ; and hope of mercy, pardon and supply, save them from despair. This faint hope of salvation keeps their head above water till their feet are on the rock. This was the case with the prodigal at this period of his pilgrimage ; a distant view of his father's house furnished his desponding soul with a gleam of trembling hope.

First : He lifts up his weeping eyes to look over the dark mountains toward his father's house, in a very distant land, and reflects with mixed grief and pleasure on the *happy state* of those who enjoy such abundance in the house where he himself once dwelt. In taking this

view, he envies their happy lot who have bread enough and to spare, while he perisheth with hunger. He saith within himself, 'How striking the *contrast*!—How immensely different their condition and mine! they live like the sons of princes, while I am numbered with beggars; they fare sumptuously every day, and I perish with hunger; they are arrayed in white garments, when I have nothing but filthy rags; they enjoy sweet communion with saints, while I associate with filthy swine; they feast on all the delicacies of the King's table, while I have no better fare than the husks which the swine do eat; they feed on the bread of life and live for ever, and I die with hunger.—Hard, *very hard* indeed, is my lot and condition; but I brought all this on myself: I was not driven from my father's house, but ran away. My kind father gave me a great portion; but I spent all in riotous living. What I have sowed, I now reap: my sufferings are the fruits of my sins. I sowed to the wind, and I reap the whirlwind; I sowed to the flesh, and of the flesh I reap corruption. Wo is me that I have sinned.' Such were the sighs and moans which flowed from his broken heart, while he thought of his father's house, and of the happiness of his family.

2. God keeps a *full house* and a well-furnished table for his family. The provisions which he has made for his church and people are immensely great; "He satisfies all their wants according to his riches in glory." "They shall be all abundantly satisfied with the fulness of thy house, and thou shalt make them

drink of the rivers of thy pleasures." Ps. xxxvi. 8. No feast like the gospel feast; a feast of fat things, and of wines well refined! It is a marriage feast, which the King of Glory made for his Son Jesus. The provisions for this feast are made according to his riches in glory. He hath provided every thing that his own infinite love could furnish; all that the blood of Immanuel, the God-man could purchase; all that his boundless kingdom could produce. He has laid out on this feast his unsearchable riches of grace. Here are the *very best things* that are found in heaven itself; the greatest variety that divine wisdom could devise; the most precious things existing, even the true and durable riches; and the greatest possible abundance, even all the fulness that is in Christ Jesus; in whom all fulness dwells, even the fulness of the Godhead bodily. It may then be truly said, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." 1 Cor. ii. 9.—It would be utterly impossible even to *name* all the provisions in God's kingdom of salvation. Here is the bread of life, of which if a man eat he shall never die; there are the living waters; yea, rivers of pleasures, even the fountain of life: there are white robes, palms, and crowns, and heavenly mansions prepared for all the true disciples of Jesus.—Oh the *immensity* of the provisions which God hath made for those that shall be saved! Eternal deliverance to captives; eternal rest for the weary; eternal triumph to the soldiers of Christ; and eternal joy to those that

mourn in Sion. In a word, "All spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" are ready for them.— "All things are ready."

3. Every thinking believer must be filled with *astonishment* at the thought of the provisions which God hath made for them that love him. If there be any thing that will excite our astonishment in an equal degree, it must be to hear that most of the human race are perfectly *indifferent* about these provisions, and give a decided preference to what the world can give for a few days or years. Nay, more, they *refuse* to accept of them as the free gift of God. When invited to partake of this glorious and eternal feast, they say, "Excuse us, we cannot come." When they are invited and intreated to come for safety under the protection of Christ, and be reconciled to God, they cry out, "We will not come," and "This man shall not reign over us." But why is this? Because they have no heart to believe the gospel report. And they have hearts that can hate all that is holy. So between the unbelief of the heart and enmity of the carnal mind, they willingly let go all the grand realities of eternity, and grasp the shadows of time, and so perish in unbelief.

Serious thoughts of what God hath provided for the salvation of sinners, are the most effectual means to prevail on them to return home. The prodigal thinks of the abundance that is in his father's house, and weeps with longing.—Let all sinners know that there is bread enough there and to spare. Enough for them, enough for all. How many generations one after another have lived at our Saviour's table! When one generation

ate to the full, they left plenty for the next generation. As one sun serves to give light to all generations, so one Christ is enough for the universal church in earth and heaven, in time, and when time shall be no more. The fountain of life flows for ever ; drink what you will, there is more left than you have taken. What is drank of the water of an ocean is not missed. What is an ocean to Christ ! Verily, in our Father's house is enough for ever and to *spare*.

Secondly, " Yet I *perish* with hunger," saith the prodigal. Doubtless " all that are far from God shall perish." Not because there is nothing to save them alive ; but because of their distance from their Father's house, and their refusing to return home. Return they must, or perish without remedy. There is no bread to keep alive, but in God's house. You may feed your soul on earthly treasures, on carnal delights, on your fancied excellence ; but feed on what you will you perish, till you come to feed on Christ the bread of life. " He that eateth not my flesh, and drinketh not my blood, shall not see life ;" when " he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever."

1. " I perish with hunger." We see that *crosses and afflictions* are *excellent means* in the hand of the Holy Spirit, to prepare sinners to return to God. " Lord, in trouble they have visited thee, they poured forth a prayer when thy chastening was upon them." Isaiah xxvi. 16. " When bound in affliction and iron, they cried unto the Lord in their distresses." Ps. cvii. " In their affliction they will seek me early." Hosea v. 15. Prosperity intoxicates the heart, tribulation sobers it

again. We shun nothing like crosses, yet nothing is more beneficial to us.

Yet crosses and sufferings alone will *never convert the soul*, this is the work of the Holy Spirit. We see many deeply afflicted, who never turned to the Lord. Pharaoh with many others, had plenty of plagues, yet they hardened their hearts the more. In the hand of the Spirit crosses and afflictions are some of the chief means to bring sinners to repentance, and to stir them up to seek after God. Yet all the tribulation of the world would bring no sinners to true repentance, without the Holy Ghost working by them. Afflictions plow the ground, but God sows the seed, and makes it grow.

What must we think of those that have suffered much, but are *no better*; often under the rod, but not reformed; often in the furnace which is in Zion, but not purified from their dross. "They have not returned unto him that smote them." The very same crosses and trials which prevailed on others to return to God, have left them to continue the slaves of sin. The hunger which compelled some to come home to their Father's house, have left them still at the swine's trough, desiring to feed on the husks which the swine do eat. Such sinners have the greatest cause to *tremble*; for the most powerful means have failed to bring them home. "He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Prov. xxix. 1. God saith to those who refused to hear the rod, "I will gather you and blow upon you in the fire of my wrath, and you shall be

melted in the midst thereof." Ezek. xxii. 21. Hear ye this, tremble and repent.

Let the people of God see to it that they *reap benefit* by their trials and sufferings, for that is the end God has in all our chastisements. He correcteth us for our *profit*, to make us partakers of his holiness; see Heb. xii. 5—10. When God's children fall asleep on the bosom of the world, the Lord comes, and takes away from them some of their chief enjoyments, in order to awake them, and when they awake, he restores their comforts. When his children wander far from their Father's house, he lets some of the fierce dogs of this world loose upon them to drive them home. Crosses are at times so ponderous and galling, that they weigh us down and our strength is gone. But why is this? Is it a mark of hatred? No, it is a token of love; it is to teach us and compel us to rest on the arm of the Lord, and to go up out of the wilderness leaning on our beloved. When Christians are put in the furnace, let them take heed that they come out purified, or the hand of the Lord will be stretched out still against them. Reformation or destruction must be the lot of all. Then, if famine is come into the land, return to thy Father's house.

2. 'Though there is bread enough in my Father's house, enough for all, and enough for ever, yet I perish with hunger.' But *why* do you perish? Why not arise and go home? Look at this phenomenon. The Father makes immense provisions, and yet the son for whom these provisions are made perisheth with hunger. But

why is this? The Father is willing to receive his sön home, and to give him all that he hath. But the son is unwilling to come home. He wants to be supplied in the far country, but his Father will not give him so much as one morsel of the true bread there. He must return home or die with famine.

So stands the matter between sinners and their God. His salvation is provided; the bread of life and the water of life are ready; the well of life and the way of life are ready; "All things are ready." Yet sinners perish. But why perish when such immense provisions are made ready, and made ready on purpose for them? How is this? Are not they willing to be pardoned, and saved, and be happy? Yes, they all earnestly covet this. How is it then that they perish with hunger? Because they *will not come home* to their Father's house; and their Father will never supply them any where else. "God placeth salvation in Sion." And there sinners must go, or die with hunger in the wilderness. "Return unto me, and I will return unto you," is the voice of God. Keep away from Christ, and you shall never taste of his supper. Though his house is full, yet they that are afar off shall perish with hunger. Arise, sinner, and come away.

3. Though afflictions are powerful means under the management of the Holy Spirit to bring sinners to repentance, yet *these alone are not sufficient*; the sinner must know that God is merciful, or will never return to him. A sense of misery without a sense of mercy will never bring him to true repentance. The prodigal must look at his Father's house, and think of his pardoning

love, as well as attend to his own starving condition, before he feels any inclination to go home. He must view God as a sin pardoning God, before he ever returns to him as a penitent.

Come then and view the rivers of his *tender mercies*. It was in mercy that he kept you from a thousand sins which your nature would have led you to commit. And have not you committed sins that justly deserve eternal punishment? and are not many in hell for the very sins that you have been guilty of? How marvellous then is that mercy which has spared you so long under the means of salvation! Let a sense of this infinite mercy lead you to repentance, that you may never perish. See also how merciful God is in *continuing* to you the mercies which you have abused. You have abused your faculties and bodily senses, your health and strength; you have abused your religious privileges, gospel ordinances, and means of grace, yet God continues them to you, and lengthens out your days to enjoy them. Let this prove to you that he is the Father of mercies. Above all, view him as the God of *salvation*. He so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life. Surely we need no further proof that 'his nature and property is always to have mercy.'

Then look at thy heavenly Father in his own *true character*, as the Father of mercies and God of all grace; as a sin-pardoning God, and one that delighteth in mercy, and willing to forgive. View the ocean of his love and the rivers of his grace till thine hard heart

melts, till thy soul longs to return to thy Father's house. If you return, he will pardon all thy past sins and forgive all thine offences. Does he not say to thee now, 'My son, only return; it is all I ask; though thy sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow. I have opened a fountain in the blood of my Son Jesus for sin and uncleanness; I will wash thee there from all thy filthiness, and all thine uncleanness, and I will no more remember thine iniquities, but will blot them out of my book, and cover them from my sight for ever. I pledge my truth and swear by my holiness that so will I act, if you do but return. "And if you return, return unto me saith the Lord."'

Such is the *language of God* to you prodigals. Yea, such is the tender, forgiving, alluring voice of your heavenly Father. And can you resist such language of grace, mercy, and love? Can you be deaf to such kind invitations and gracious promises? Is it possible! Then what is the state of your hearts? How strong must be your love of sin and enmity against God! Where must you go? There is no other Saviour, no other way of salvation, no other gospel of grace, but what you now have. Reject these, and you inevitably perish for ever. Oh then *to-day*, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, but melt in deep repentance; arise and go to thy Father, and throw thy guilty souls on the multitude of his tender mercies, and he will have mercy upon you, and no more remember thy sins.

VII.—THE PIOUS RESOLUTION.

Ver. 18.—*I will arise and go to my father.*

WE have here the solemn RESOLUTION of an awakened sinner to leave the land of sin and death, and return to the land of life. While musing on his own perishing condition, and on the felicity of those who feast on the salvation of God, the fire kindled in his breast till he formed this holy resolution ;—“ I will arise, and go to my father.” Yes, I must leave this dismal, barren land, and go into Immanuel’s kingdom. I can endure no longer the tyranny of Satan and the bands of sin ; but I must assert my liberty, and go to the kingdom of God’s dear Son. There alone true liberty can be found. I shall no longer lie down at the swine’s trough, and perish with hunger ; but will go to my father’s house, to feast my soul on the living bread which came down from heaven, of which if a man eat, he shall live for ever.’—Such is the holy resolution that the Spirit of God inspires in the heart of every sinner that he is going to save.

1. It is very evident that multitudes who call themselves Christians, have *never resolved* at all to depart from iniquity to serve the living God.—How very unlike Christians are they who *openly rebel* against heaven ! There are not a few that delight in iniquity, and serve sin with greediness : they live as if they defied heaven, and scorned the counsels of the Most High ; from their birth to the grave, have never once

resolved, nor even wished to arise and go to the Father. Yet even these call themselves Christians.—Many others of *more decent morals* and amiable qualities, lie down quietly among the dead, and have no thoughts of repentance, nor any desire to return in heart to God. They trust to their moral virtues and not to Christ: they have strong confidence in the flesh, but no confidence in the Saviour's blood. These are whole, and feel not their need of the Physician, and therefore never resolve to arise and go to the Father.—O sinner, if thou art like either of these, what hopes can be entertained that you will ever arrive in glory? There is no finishing a journey without beginning it; nor will any ever begin till they first resolve to leave all things for Christ. If you reject the Saviour, and shun the way of holiness, God will deny you the kingdom, and suffer you to perish with hunger. All who continue in the far country; poverty, wretchedness, and ruin, must be their portion to drink. Hosts of sinners never once resolve to leave that far country.

2. Others are for ever *wavering* about returning home, and are not a jot more safe than those who lie down quietly in the far country. Many are very uneasy in their perishing condition, and tremble for fear of judgment; yet have no heart to arise and go to the Father. Such sinners are in a very pitiable condition:—they long for salvation, and yet refuse to leave the far country, where salvation never comes:—they envy the happiness of those that go to Sion, yet cannot find in their hearts to leave Babylon:—they often say to those that are in the way to heaven, “We will go with

you, for we have heard that God is with you ;” yet are never ready to shake off their bands and march for heaven :—they ardently covet the felicity of the men of grace, but are never prepared to walk in the holy ways of religion ; with Balaam they desire to die the death of the righteous, without living the life of the righteous :—they expect what is impossible,—to have the inheritance of the saints, without having the character of the saints ; and to go to heaven, without being in the way that leads there.—These half-awakened sinners have many religious *fits*, and often bid fair for the kingdom of heaven ; but have no steadiness, no perseverance, and make no progress in religion :—they ebb and flow like the tide of the sea ; move backwards and forwards like the door on its hinges ; halt between two opinions ; “ unstable as water, they shall not excel.”—With all their fair promises and purposes, they never set off ; nor form a steadfast resolution, to leave all, to take up the cross, and follow Christ, in the way of self-denial, to heaven. But why not resolve ? They are not under sufficient conviction of their perishing condition, or concerned for salvation ; nor do they cordially believe what God saith of his kingdom of grace.—In this wavering state, the grand adversary has great advantage over them, and they are easily carried away with every wind of doctrine :—not having on the holy armour, they have no strength to withstand temptations. To continue in this wavering state, is to perish with hunger in the far country.

3. We must *truly and steadfastly resolve* to go to glory, or we can never arrive there. All that shall

inherit life eternal, resolve, with full purpose of heart, to depart from all ungodliness; to serve the living God; to die to sin, and live unto righteousness; to put off the old man with his deeds; and to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness, Eph. iv. 24.

How came they to form this holy resolution? By believing the testimony of God in scripture: see Eph. iv. 21. When once they come to believe God, they see things as they really are:—they see themselves lost, condemned, and ruined:—they see that there is a glorious salvation in Christ Jesus:—they see it possible for them to obtain that salvation. These believing views inspire their hearts with the hope of glory, and compel them to form this admirable resolution;—to arise and go to the Father, in the new and living way which is opened for them. When through faith they come to see their ruined state, and the help that is laid for them on one almighty to save, the hope of heaven begins to dawn on their desponding souls; they cry, ‘We will arise and go to the Father, and not stay here to perish with hunger.’

4. This resolution must be *rightly formed*, or it will soon come to nothing. Many, under alarms of conscience, under fear of judgment, and dread of hell, form hasty and well-meant resolutions to repent and turn.—But these are often of short duration:—let their old companions call on them to go to the tavern, or the playhouse, they soon relax, they yield, they go, like the ox to the slaughter, or the swine to the dung-hill: “In time of temptation they fall away.” No

sooner is this done, but their consciences are filled with horror at the thought of their base and treacherous conduct;—they again form new resolutions, and bind themselves with stronger vows; yet, after all, when their peculiar temptations return, they are overcome and carried away: when once they get into the whirlpool, their strength is gone, and they become an easy prey to their lusts and temptations. They wonder how this can be; for they were very sincere in forming their resolutions, and yet they are easily overcome of evil. The great secret is not explained to them. Their confidence is yet in the flesh, and not in the Lord the Saviour. They act in their own strength, and not in the strength of the Lord God.—And what is their strength, separate from Christ, but perfect weakness? And they have not yet learnt, “that their heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.”—They run, but not in the way: they build, but not on the rock: they have not counted the cost, and have no strength to finish.

When God designs to make, of any of these, *vessels of mercy*, he will, sooner or later, bring them into such straits, as will convince them of their absolute need of Christ, as their strength and righteousness: he will give them sensibly to feel, that they have no might to withstand and overcome the hosts that come against them; and he will give them to hear the Saviour's voice, saying, “In me is thine help found.” And when they come to see what is treasured up for them in Christ Jesus, they begin to exclaim with gladness of heart, “In the Lord have I righteousness and strength:”

Now, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God, and will make mention of his righteousness, even of his only." A resolution so formed, will break through every band, overcome every enemy, and subdue all difficulties.

5. Were sinners duly to *consider their ways*, their vast concerns, and their latter end, they would soon resolve to break through all, and return unto the Lord their God. None but the thoughtless can continue in sin, and quietly lose heaven, and be merry in the road to endless ruin : serious consideration would soon lead to holy resolutions ; and serious meditation would produce devotion. All the actions of our lives begin with the mind ; and the common way of the Spirit, in the new creation, is to arrest the mind, and fasten the thoughts on the great concerns of man. By deep thinking, the mind is enlightened to form a right judgment of the way of life : and, in viewing the grace and glory of Christ, the affections are allured, and the will is gained.—Then the soul resolves to arise and return home.

As you wish to find mercy and be saved, *begin to think* like dying men. You have before you these great subjects to employ your meditations.—Inquire into the *real state* of your own souls ; whether they are dead in sin, or alive unto God ; in the way to destruction, or to glory ; saved, or lost.—Meditate with close attention on the *glorious Saviour*, as the fountain of life, and the way to God ; as the foundation which is laid in Sion ; and as the portion and inheritance of the saints in light.—Meditate also on

the *deep miseries* and endless torments of the lost world, “where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.”—Then turn your thoughts to *heaven* above, and view the men of grace arrived in glory, inheriting the kingdom, and drinking of the rivers of pleasures which flow for ever there, and enjoying the triumphs of eternity.—Then ask, *Where am I?* and to what country am I travelling? and where am I likely to be for ever?—Again, I say, meditate on subjects like these till your *heart* is deeply affected; till your affections are fixed on things above; and until you resolve to arise and go to the Father. Here are *two points* that the awakened sinner is determined upon; and the first is this,—

I. “I will **ARISE**.” I have been down long enough, and low enough; but will stay no longer in this degraded, miserable state. I will arise and begin my way home.—When the soul is enlightened by the Holy Ghost to see *where he is*, he cannot continue any longer as a captive in a foreign land, but will assert his liberty. The flesh will plead for further indulgence, but grace must prevail. The awakened sinner can no longer trifle in matters of life and death, but comes to a point, and saith, “I will arise.” But *why not* continue in the land where you have been for so many years; and where you have numbers of all ranks to keep you company? To this he replies, ‘While my eyes were blind, and my heart dead in sin, I was easy and unconcerned; willing to stay here, and reluctant to leave:—but now, having mine eyes opened to see the nature of the country I dwell in, to stay here any

longer is utterly impossible :—And some of my reasons for determining to leave, are these.

1. It is, in the first place, a *most dangerous* country to abide in. Here I am liable every day to be taken up as a rebel against heaven ; a traitor against my lawful Sovereign ; and an enemy to the God of salvation. How then can I continue here any longer ? To-morrow the officer of divine justice may have his commission from the court of heaven to apprehend me, and to cast me into prison. The sentence of condemnation is past upon me already : and the only way to escape death is to go out of this country into the kingdom of salvation ; and hide myself in the refuge provided for sinners like me, where alone I can escape the torments of eternity.

2. Besides, in this dreary land, I can find nothing to *supply* my numerous wants. It is a land of poverty, of wretchedness, and of ruin ; where there is not one thing to contribute to my comfort. How then can a lost sinner abide in such a land as this ? For here I can find no Saviour, no salvation, no refuge, and no rest. It is indeed a most dismal country, and if I continue in it, I must remain a wretched being ; for here is no grace to save my ruined soul, no bread of life, no garments of salvation, nor any one spiritual blessing, nor hope of glory. What temptation then can I have to tarry any longer in a land, where the sun never shines, and where the inhabitants pine with hunger ? It is indeed the place of dragons, the habitation of cruelty, where Satan's seat is. To think of staying here any longer is to me impossible ; I

will arise and direct my course towards my father's house.'

3. At this stage, the pilgrim has some *glimmering* view of the Redeemer's kingdom, and the privileges of his subjects. Though these views are yet faint, as through a glass darkly, yet they create in his soul a longing desire to be in a state of salvation, to share the felicity of the people of God. This, above all other motives, quickens his soul, and induces him to say, that he will arise from his low estate, leave this land of darkness, and go to Sion.—He now begins to see something of the glory of Christ, the treasures of his grace, and the preciousness of his salvation. He beholds the great river of life, the foundation that is laid in Sion, and the new way to God. He sees that all things are provided in the kingdom of grace, to make the sinner safe and happy. When these things are once discovered, the pilgrim saith, 'How infinitely better is that land of life that breaks in upon my view, than this dismal country where I dwell! "I will arise and go to my Father."' "

He now looks at his *old companions* who are gone up to Sion before him, and saith, What different men are they now from what they once were! they formerly wallowed in sin, and sunk in vileness; but now they are washed and arrayed in white robes. They once were captive slaves, like myself, in this foreign land; but now they are at home with the Father enjoying the glorious liberty of the gospel. They were once, as I still am, on the brink of the pit, and in the utmost peril; but they are now in perfect safety, in the clefts of the rock of ages,

and under the wings of mercy : kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. They enjoy the highest privileges, as the sons of God, and heirs of the kingdom, while I am still exposed to the utmost dangers. Yet even now I have one comfort left me ; I do not dwell in the land of despair : the door of hope is open before me, and the King of Sion invites me to enter into his kingdom. I will therefore arise and go to mount Sion, and to the city of the living God, the new Jerusalem.

4. Now the sinner is sure to have *peculiar temptations* ; for this is the hour and power of darkness. While he stays quietly in the enemy's kingdom, Satan employs him, but does not yet torment him ; but the moment he offers to depart he shall hear from Satan, who will soon be in arms against him. If the sinner offers to go to Christ, Satan will try to throw him down.—Many, deep, and marvellous are his stratagems and devices, to keep men from leaving his kingdom. —He first of all tries to *persuade* them to stay where they are, and strives hard to make them believe that they cannot better their condition. He saith, “ My kingdom will afford you the highest gratifications and delights ; men of honour, learning, wealth, and pleasure, choose to remain within my dominions, and it is your interest to abide quietly with them.—Where persuasions fail, he has his ensnaring *temptations* ready. He will turn the attention of the sinner to some alluring objects, in order to divert his mind from the great concerns of eternity. He allures him to form improper connexions ; to engage in some injurious projects ; or to

enter into some ensnaring line of life, where his corruptions will be called into action.—Should this stratagem also fail, Satan will change his policy, and try next to *allay the fears* of the trembling sinner by persuading him to believe that he has religion enough to save him without going to Christ. He will tell him that to feel distress, weep, and tremble is all that is necessary; and all this you have sufficiently felt, and what more would you have? He strives artfully to conceal from the sinner his need of Christ, and faith in his name, when nothing short of this can save the sinner. It is no where said, he that trembles and weeps shall be saved; but he that believeth in the Son of God hath life, and he that believeth not is condemned already. If the awakened sinner still resolves to arise, and cannot be easy where he is, Satan will next try to drive him to *despondency*, and to *despair* of finding mercy. The enemy saith to him, recollect what a notorious sinner you have been; you have rebelled against your Maker, and kindled his anger against you to the uttermost; how can you expect pity or favour at his hands? There may be mercy for others; but there can be none for you. Give up all hopes of salvation, and fill thine heart with the delights and pleasures found within my dominions.

Satan strives hard to *discourage* beginners in religion, by magnifying the *difficulties* in the way to heaven. He saith, how can a feeble creature like you level those high mountains that stand in your way to Paradise? And how can you subdue such formidable hosts of enemies as you have to encounter? And above

all, how can you quench the fire of wrath which you have kindled in heaven against your guilty soul? He saith again, why are you so desirous of joining these *religious people*, which are every where spoken against? You see they are mostly poor, and a despised people, and their names cast out as evil? And you cannot say that they are better or happier than other people. They are generally of a mournful cast, and some of them have turned back to me, and the rest were never so merry as when they were within my dominion.—Believe me, the whole of their religion is a mere delusion; therefore be content to tarry where you are, and talk no more about rising up to go away. Such are some of Satan's devices to entangle the sinner when he thinks seriously of departing out of his kingdom.

5. And how does the awakened sinner *escape his snares*? How does he overcome such a powerful enemy, and subtle temptations? He betakes himself to prayer; he flees to the refuge, and hides himself under the wings of mercy. Under a deep sense of his weakness and danger he commits his cause unto God, and cries aloud, 'Lord undertake for me, and deliver me from the hands of my enemies. Lord help me, and have mercy upon me; save or I perish. I have no power or might to withstand this formidable enemy that comes against me; my strength is perfect weakness, and my soul is in the most perilous condition; Lord, be thou my helper, defender, and deliverer: save me for thy name's sake. The more *violent* the temptations, the more the penitent trembles, and the more earnest he wrestles with God in prayer for help and

protection in this time of need. God suffers the tempter to distress him more and more to convince him more thoroughly of his need of a Saviour. And this sense of danger drives him day by day to the throne of grace, to cry for mercy and protection. While the tempted and afflicted penitent continues as an importunate *beggar* before the door of mercy, the Lord looks down from heaven and pities his distressed child, and sends him help from his holy place. The Lord from on high saith, "I have seen, I have seen the deep affliction of this repenting sinner, and I am come down to deliver him from the hands of all his enemies. Here the Lord *clothes* his servant with the holy armour; teacheth his hands to war and his fingers to fight; and covers his head in the day of battle; and addresseth him in this animating strain: "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, I will help thee, and thou shalt thresh the mountains and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff.—Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." Isa. xli.—The praying penitent hears the language of grace, believes it, and applies it to himself. Then is he greatly relieved from his fears; takes courage, renews the combat with the enemy; and in the strength of Jesus conquers; asserts his liberty; and marches out of the enemy's kingdom, and saith,—

II. "I WILL GO TO MY FATHER."

1. We find that all things *naturally draw towards home*. They have a strong tendency towards the country from whence they came, and will never

rest till they arrive there again. Whatever came originally from the *earth*, draw back towards the earth again. All plants, animals, and our own bodies, came from the earth, and to the earth will they return.—All sins proceeded from hell, and they draw towards it again as naturally as the rivers to the sea.—Grace originates in heaven, and the very nature of grace is to ascend and draw towards heaven, and will never rest till it arrives there.—This prodigal is born from above, and his new nature draws him towards home. It is this heavenly principle that induces him to say, “I will go to my Father.”—Wherever grace is implanted, it *strives* to rise and go to its native country. It has rocks and mountains; seas of trouble, and worlds of difficulties in its way home; yet grace will strive to break through all, and return to its native land. “It groans being burdened,” yet struggles hard to return to the Father. The difficulty is great, yet “all things are possible to him that believeth.” So determined is grace to go home to heaven, that it will contend with earth and hell, and struggle against the greatest difficulties that can meet us in our way to glory. And no power in all creation can keep the weakest believer from going home to heaven. Every grain of grace must return to God from whence it came. The prodigal was sunk very low and gone very far from God; but the moment the grace of God touched his heart, he cries, I will arise and go to my Father; and he arose and came to him.

2. Here the *Holy Ghost* begins his gracious operation on the sinner's heart, by creating hunger and

thirst after righteousness, and resolution to return to God.—This is the turning point, when the sinner first turns his face towards Sion. This is the first breath of the new born soul, and the very dawn of the eternal day on the heart.

O perishing sinners, take heed how you *manage* this small beginning : this dawn of life ; this first visit of the Spirit of life. Your eternal life may depend on your conduct now. Then beware that you do not resist the Holy Spirit, nor smother your first convictions. Quench not the smoking flax, but blow it into a flame ;—quench not the Spirit, lest he depart from you, and leave you to perish in the far country.

Go not now unto such *companies* as will discourage you, laugh you out of your seriousness, or divert your attention from your great concern. We must not ruin our souls, and forfeit heaven for ever to please an ungodly world, that is at enmity with God. Then instead of going into the world to smother your first convictions ; “ Go to thy Father in secret,” and there pour out your heart before him in earnest prayer. Cry mightily unto God to create in you a new heart, and renew a right spirit within you. When the Holy Spirit visits your soul, grieve him not by entertaining his enemies in his presence ; lest God is provoked to take his Spirit from you, and leave you to perish in the hands of your enemies.

As you value eternal life, *nourish* your first serious concern for salvation. Has the Lord kindled a spark of grace in your heart, fan it into a flame ; add fuel to the fire, that it may not be extinguished, but burn up.

to heaven. As a means of growth in grace, read the oracles of God ; hear the language of grace ; give credit to the God of truth ; obey his voice ; embrace the Saviour, and follow him faithfully. When the Lord creates hunger, feed on the bread of heaven ; —when he gives thirst, drink of the river of life ; —when he excites longing for your Father's house, arise and go to him.

3. Where there is life, there will be *growth*. If we have begun the way to the Father, we shall proceed on our journey. If the sinner is once made to stand on his feet, he will set off for his Father's house. He begins to travel as soon as he begins to live ; and will take step after step till he arrives at home in his Father's kingdom. The grace that gives life is a grace that will give *growth* : and the grace that never grows will die away, and come to nothing. When the God of salvation is once *known*, the soul will draw towards him. Every view of Jesus has an alluring and transforming power ; and the nearer we approach, the stronger the attraction. They that are ingrafted into Christ, grow up in all things in Christ. The babe becomes a young man, and then a father. Nothing has *so much growth* in it as the grace of God in the human soul. It is at first like a grain of mustard seed, but grows into a great tree. The new-born soul has hardly strength to whisper in prayer, but gradually grows strong enough to overcome the world and conquer death, and to triumph always in Christ Jesus. The feeble hope grows into complete victory ; the grain of sand becomes a great mountain ; and the dawning light

increaseth to the perfect day. The Christian arrives at last to the “measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”—Christians *differ* in nothing more than in their growth in grace. Some are rooted and grounded very soon, while others waver for many years. Some are like ripe corn at an early age, while others are like withered shrubs in old age. In *order to grow* in the divine life, there must be great concern and circumspection, diligence and sincerity, watching and praying. Our growth in grace, under God, greatly depends on the kind of public ministry we stately attend; the manner family worship is conducted; the nature of our intercourse with our Father in secret; and the use we make of the holy scriptures. Nothing so desirable and *advantageous* as to make progress in the way everlasting. What is progress but drawing nearer to God; growing more like Christ; and enjoying stronger hope of glory. In one word, to grow in grace, is to travel home to God, and this the prodigal is now determined upon, “I will go to my Father.”

4. But stop, sir. Are you not the prodigal son, who has wasted his portion in riotous living? How *dare* you face your Father, or ever hope for pardon? Remember your rebellious conduct, and the provocations you have given him. You have forfeited his favour for ever, grieved his heart, and provoked his anger to the uttermost. How then can you appear any more in his presence? Is not God a consuming fire to such a transgressor as you are? How then can you venture to draw nigh unto him? Should others find pardon and peace, you must look for nothing but indignation

and wrath. Yet for all this I see you are *going back* to your Father. Pray, tell me, what encouragement have you to return? and on what do you ground your hope of pardon and reconciliation?—To this the penitent prodigal replies, ‘ I ground my hope and expectation of obtaining mercy and peace, on a gracious *message* which my heavenly Father has sent me by the hands of Prophets and Apostles. The message runs thus—“ My son, hear the instruction of a Father, and be wise.” Know that my name is “ The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin.” Ex. xxxiv. 7, 8. “ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon,” Isa. lv. 7. Return thou, my son, return unto me; though I was angry with thee, yet, on thy repentance, mine anger is turned away. “ Though thy sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.” Only return, and I will spread a veil of forgiveness over all thy past conduct, and will cover all thy sins. I will even blot them out of my book, and bury them in everlasting oblivion. These things will I do unto thee, and will no more forsake thee. Return, and I will be yet a Father unto thee, and will enfold thee in the arms of my everlasting love, and constitute thee a heir of heaven.—Such is the most gracious message which my forgiving Father has sent unto me. It is full of grace and compassion; it is melting; it is overwhelming; it is irresistible.

The tender nature of this message overcomes my heart ; it melts me down ; it wins my soul, and draws me home. “ I will go to my Father.” ’

5. The sinner, when he comes into distress and misery, has *no where to go at last* for help and comfort, but to his God. The prodigal once thought he could do very well without his father, and that the farther from him the better. But when he came into straits and great difficulties, he could find no friend nor deliverer ; all forsook him and fled. When thus deserted, and left without hope in his distresses, he is compelled at last to say, “ I will return to my Father.” How marvellous are the ways of grace ! The sinner fights against God, and yet when judgments come, he can go no where for defence and refuge but under the protection of the Almighty, against whom he has sinned and rebelled. *Unbelievers* indeed, in their folly, try to run away, and hide themselves in refuges of lies ; but they are soon driven out of them, and left naked, and exposed to the consuming fire. They may cry to the rocks and mountains to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb, but there will be none to pity those that have forsaken God, and refused to return.—How different do penitent *believers* act ! When they see the Lord in anger coming to take vengeance, they run to meet him, and throw themselves under the wings of his mercy, and there they find a safe shelter from his fury. “ The name of the Lord is a strong tower ; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.” Sinners inflict a thousand wounds in the bosom of Jesus, and yet to that very bosom must they flee in their distresses, when the

avenger of blood pursueth. It may be truly said of millions of sinners, "When they were at their wits' end by reason of their affliction, they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distresses." Were sinners to search through all creation, they would find no refuge but in clefts of the rock of ages; in the bleeding wounds of the glorious Immanuel. He is to all his children "like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Sinners, flee to this refuge and be eternally safe.

VIII.—THE PREPARATORY ADDRESS.

Ver. 18, 19.—*And will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.*

THE prodigal having fully made up his mind to return to his father, *considers beforehand* what he shall say unto him. He gets his speech ready, that he may address him properly. "I will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants."

What can be more *presumptuous* than for a sinner on earth to rush into the presence of the God of heaven with a thoughtless mind and unprepared heart. We

should well consider beforehand what we are, and who that God is that we are going to address. We should know beforehand what our errand is, and how to deliver it. Were we to appear before the tribunal of an earthly judge to petition for our forfeited lives and liberties, we should make every preparation in our power in order to gain our suit. How much more when we go into the presence of the judge of the whole earth, to plead for the eternal life of our ruined souls? Then go to thy God with a prepared heart.

The repenting prodigal saith, 'I am now going to my father, but how can I venture into his presence? *What shall I say?* What can I say? I cannot say that I have been a dutiful and obedient son, for I have been of all sons the most wicked and rebellious. I cannot even plead my relation to my father, for I have forfeited the very name of a son. What then shall I plead in extenuation of my guilt? I have not one plea to make; my rebellion has been voluntary. I see but one thing that I can do, and that I will do: I will prostrate myself at the feet of my father, make a free and full confession of all my transgressions, and throw myself on his mercy, for his mercies are great. Who can tell but he may pity me, and blot out mine iniquities? Who can tell but that he who so long spared the life of a rebel, may pardon the sins of a penitent? I have but this one door open for me, the door of mercy; I will enter at this door into the presence of my father, and confess my sins before him. I will say unto him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, &c."'

I. The sinner must come and CONFESS his sins unto

God, or never find mercy. Confession and remission of sins always go together. The penitent alone is pardoned ; and where there is no true repentance, there can be no remission of sins. " Except ye repent, ye shall perish." On the other hand he that confesseth his sins unto the Lord, shall not come into condemnation. Where God gives a penitent heart, he gives pardon of sin ; and where the sinner's heart is stirred up to cry for mercy, he always obtains it. So David found it. He said, " I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." Psalm xxxii. 5.

1. The God of salvation hath *ordained* confession of sins as the way to obtain forgiveness of sins. Sacrifice and offering for sin he doth not require at the hand of the transgressor ; he hath found a ransom, the atonement is made, and God is satisfied, and requireth no more satisfaction. But he requireth confession of sins. Ezra saith to the people, " Ye have transgressed, therefore make confession unto the Lord God."—We find, invariably, that all true penitents *run unto God*, and make confession of their transgressions. They cannot do otherwise, they know that God requireth this, that it is the appointed way to obtain mercy, and that it is the only possible way to be relieved of the heavy load of guilt which presseth down their souls. Hear the Psalmist, " When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my daily complaining ; I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid." And what followed ? " And thou forgavest all my sin."—It is as *natural* for every true penitent to confess his

sins unto God, as it is for him to desire happiness, or wish to escape misery. "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee, in a time when thou mayest be found." When the fear of the Lord fell on the sinners at Ephesus, "many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds." There never was a true penitent but fell down and cried, "I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."—True confession of sin is *all* that the offender can offer to his God, and it is all that his God requireth. And we every where find, that where confession is made with true contrition, full pardon immediately follows. No sooner did David cry, "I have sinned against the Lord," than the prophet said unto him, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin." Whenever rebellious Israel repented and cried, "We have sinned against the Lord," invariably the Lord relented, pitied his people, and removed their judgments. And so now, "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."—Who does not see then that confession of sin is *necessary* to salvation? No confession, no forgiveness.

2. There are multitudes of perishing sinners *who never confess* their sins unto the Lord. They may indeed say, 'We are all sinners,' 'The Lord have mercy upon us;' and they may at times repeat the confession which our church sets before them, and there use the pathetic and mournful language of penitents; but to them they are words without meaning, the language of the lips alone.—Too many that live in a Christian land

never know that sin hath separated between them and their God, and brought them into a *lost* condition. As they know neither the evil nor the danger of sin, they are never likely to make any confession, nor to obtain forgiveness from heaven, but to perish in their iniquities.—Some, like Ananias and Sapphira, are so foolish and wicked as to try to *hide* their sins from the all-seeing eye of God. They commit sin openly before the world, and yet vainly hope to conceal it from God, saying, “Tush, how doth God know?” They are not at all ashamed to rebel against heaven, but they are ashamed to confess that they are rebels. These seek the cover of night to commit iniquity; but God will set their secret sins in the light of his countenance, and there will be at last public punishment for secret sins. All attempt at concealment here, is the essence of delusion, and one of the strongest bands of death.—And what number of sinners actually *deny* their sins, and with the proud pharisee in the temple, boast of their excellencies. Tell these to come with broken hearts before the throne of mercy; they will tell you, we have no sins to burden our consciences, and we have kept the law from our youth up. To such proud characters Christ saith, that there are more hopes of seeing the vilest sinners coming to repentance and to heaven, than of them.—And multitudes of professing Christians will confess that they are sinners, but will *deny that they are great sinners*. They love the sins they commit, and can see no great harm in what they love. They practice every art to make their sins appear small. ‘O,’ says the sinner, ‘my sins are only the common

sins of the country and of the times, and less than those of many of my neighbours; and besides, I have committed them under peculiar temptations, and chiefly through the instigation of others, who must answer for them.' How very far is all this from confession of sins to God. And how very unlikely are these of ever seeing the kingdom of heaven!—Some are so hardened in wickedness, as to *plead* for their sins, and even defend their iniquities. They give to the grossest transgressions a lovely name; plead the example of high ranks in society, and call in question the threatenings of God against their ungodliness. They try by wit and fallacies to prove that sin is no sin; and so blind their own eyes and harden their hearts, till iniquity becomes their everlasting ruin. They laugh at this now, but they shall weep hereafter, when there shall be no comforter.—Some are so hardened in rebellion as “to *glory* in their shame.” So far from confessing their sins with tears of repentance, that they boast of their abominable practices; of their drunkenness, lewdness, and lying. These are Satan's most faithful servants, the greatest proficient in rebellion, and the most ripe for endless ruin. Yet strange to hear, even these will tell you that they are Christians, and confident of heaven. What strong delusion is this! expecting pardon without repentance, and to find heaven in the road to hell.

Thus we see that there are *various sorts and degrees* of sinners, who may differ in some respects from one another; but all agree in this, that they will not come as penitents before the throne of grace, to cry for mercy, that they may obtain forgiveness of sins. Let

these know, that the sins which are not truly confessed, are sins which shall *never be forgiven*. He alone who confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall find mercy, and obtain eternal life. God will never cancel the sins you try to conceal; and those you strive to hide, he will publish on the house-top; and the sins in which you glory, shall end in your eternal shame, disgrace, and torment.—O ruined sinner, view thy *perilous situation*, suspended by the feeble thread of life over the bottomless pit. Should this thread break before thy sins are forgiven, thy soul is in torments from whence there is no redemption. Then lose not the present golden moment, but apply in haste and in earnest to that God and Saviour who alone can take away sin, and save the sinner. Confess to him your transgressions and sins, and cry aloud for mercy that you perish not, but obtain life eternal. Having shewed that confession is *necessary to salvation*, we should proceed to inquire, in the next place,

II. How this confession must be made, and is made by every one that finds forgiveness from his God.

1. It is not every kind of confession that will find mercy, it must be a *true* confession; not of the mouth only, but of the heart also.—“God requireth truth in the inward parts.” We must mean what we say, and speak the truth from the heart when we speak to a heart-searching God, who knoweth what is in man.—We may *impose* upon man, and man may impose on himself; but to impose upon God is a thing impossible. Sooner may one darken the sun than blind the eyes of him who seeth in secret, and to whom darkness and

light are both alike. Nothing will go down with our God but truth; then see to it that you say nothing but truth unto him when you tell him on your knees that you repent of your sins, and loath yourself as a transgressor. God will never regard any thing but truth, and nothing short of true confession will ever obtain forgiveness of sins.

There are several sorts of confessions that will prove *unavailing*.—There is a *general* confession which means nothing; we must come to particulars. St. Paul mentions by name his most grievous sins:—I was a persecutor, injurious, and a blasphemer. As you would tell your physician in what parts of your body your pains are; go and tell your God what sins chiefly injure and afflict your soul. There is a *formal* dry confession which never reaches to heaven, nor finds pardon; they who make it have no quarrel with sin, nor intention to part with it. Their confession is like that of a debtor which cares nothing about his debts, and only wishes to go without punishment. Where sin itself is become a burden, there is a longing for release, and more earnest cry to have sin forgiven, than to escape the penalty. There is also the confession of mere *dread and fear of judgments*. Pharaoh, Saul, Ahab, and Jeroboam, with many more, could say, “I have sinned, pray for me.” But prayer was made, and judgments removed; they sinned yet the more, which plainly proved that there was no truth in their confessions. Even Judas confessed his sins in despair, and never asked for mercy. Then let us never forget that God requireth *truth* in our confessions.

2. Our confession of sin must be such as the *occasion requires*. In bowing before the throne let us always recollect *what a God* he is, against whom we have sinned; he is infinite in holiness and in all perfections. The least offence that can be committed against him is a greater evil than the destruction of a world: what then will become of us whose sins are innumerable as the sand of the sea. And we have sinned with a high hand; we have cast off our allegiance and rebelled against his kingdom; we have left him and went after idols; we have preferred our own wills and ways to his; and set up self on the throne where God alone should reign. What evils have we not done?—We broke all the holy laws of heaven; and with our sins have we crucified the Lord of glory, grieved his Spirit, and abused the multitude of his tender mercies. Lay all this to heart, and your confession of sin will flow out in strong torrents from a broken and bleeding heart. When the sinner sees his offended God coming in wrath against him, to punish him with everlasting destruction, how loud, how earnest, how importunate, will be his cries for mercy and pardon!

3. In true confession of sins there is always the *joint exercise of faith and repentance*. One without the other would be unavailing: we must have both, or we are no true confessors, and we obtain no pardon.

The true confessor has *two eyes*; with one he looks at himself, and sees his transgressions and his danger: With the other eye he looks at Christ, and sees his atoning blood and his pardoning mercy. The view

he has of himself humbles him, breaks his heart, and makes him to cry out, "I have sinned against heaven." The view he has of the Saviour, inspires hopes of pardon, and draws him home to his father's house. Here he is like one suspended between two powerful influences. A deep sense of guilt sinks him down to death, and hope of mercy puts life into his soul and bears him up.

In confession of sins, *faith* would not do without repentance, nor repentance without faith; they must both be there, and kept in exercise.—Were we to confess our sins with the deepest sorrow and the bitterest wailing, and had *no faith* in the atonement, this would only break the heart with grief, and leave the soul to sink in death. The deepest repentance can make no atonement, and without faith in the atonement the sinner must perish.

Or were we to act faith on Christ, *without repentance* towards God, such a faith cannot save us, it is not the faith of God's elect. The true faith of the gospel is not a mere doctrinal sentiment in the head, but an operative principle in the soul. The faith that unites the sinner to Christ, purifieth the heart, worketh by love, and overcometh the world.—There is a kind of a spurious faith, which makes a mighty shew, but is *alone*, and produceth not the fruits of righteousness. It makes indeed a great parade about exalting the Saviour, when no device of Satan ever degraded him more. Faith, with these men, is every thing, and repentance and personal holiness nothing. But that faith which casts away repentance towards God, is an airy phantom, the

dream of delirium, and the soul of delusion. These solidians put to sea with high sails, and having no ballast, soon make shipwreck of their faith. These airy light professors, filled with inflammable air, soar on high and look down on all mankind as a pigmy race that walk in darkness, or contemptible reptiles crawling in the dust. The prominent family features of the whole fraternity, are pride, bitterness of spirit, abusive language, and contempt of all that cannot see with their eyes. "By their fruits ye shall know them." The creed that corrects the sinner's errors, refines his nature, transforms him into the likeness of Christ, and makes him of one spirit with the Lord, must be the true creed, which the Holy Ghost inspireth. But the creed of these Antinomians produceth no such fruits, but the very reverse; you will invariably find them full of vain conceit, harshness of spirit, bold presumption, and arrogant claim to superior light, and new discoveries. Such sour fruits tell you plainly what the tree is. Those who exalt faith and decry repentance, wear the mask of fine profession, that conscience may not disturb their repose in the bosom of sin.

"Repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," are always *working together* in the heart of every true confessor of sins before the throne of grace. This was taught to penitent believers under the law. They laid their hands on the head of the victim, and confessed their sins. Thus were they instructed to lay their hand of faith on the head of Christ, their true sacrifice, and trust to him alone to take away sin;

and were at the same time instructed to make true confession of their sins, in order to be released.—And if confession be true, there must be a full determination to break off our sins, to *depart* from all iniquity, and to serve the living God. “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” Prov. xxviii. 13.—And wherever true confession is made, there will be an earnest *prayer* for pardon, with the hand of faith stretched out and laid on the atoning sacrifice. So may we confess, and find mercy.

III. What ENCOURAGEMENT has the sinner to confess his sins unto God? And what hopes can he have of obtaining mercy and pardon? While we look at the *sinner alone*, and see what he is, what he has done, and what he deserves, we say he can have no encouragement: for what hopes can an enemy of God have, that has rebelled against heaven itself, of obtaining mercy?—But when we turn from the sinner, and *look at God*, we see at once that he has the greatest possible encouragement to repent and turn. There never was in God's creation, greater encouragement to any one thing than the sinner has, to go and confess his sins to God. The sinner should know this, in order to draw his heart “to come boldly before the throne of grace, that he may obtain mercy, and find grace to help him in time of need.”

Then look at *God the Father*, study his character, and view his grace. “God is love,” love immense, unsearchable; like a sea that has neither bottom nor shore. Is there no attraction in this view of God?—

When you go to him, you go to a *father*, the Father of mercies, and the God of all grace. He has bowels of mercies, yea, multitudes of tender mercies: he is one that greatly delighteth in shewing mercy; for the very nature of God is to have compassion on the miserable: then, why not on you?—God's greatest *delight* is salvation: All his plans lead to this one point,—to save sinners: He would spare nothing that heaven itself could furnish, in order to bring many sons unto glory. “He so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,” John iii. 16. “And if he hath given us his Son, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” pardon of sin, and peace with heaven. In approaching the throne, should you, after all, *fear* that sins like your's cannot be forgiven; thy Father, to prevent thy fear, crieth from heaven, “I, even I, am he that blot-teth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins,” Isa. xliii. 25.—See also ch. xlv. 22. Let such alluring views as these of the heavenly Father draw you before the throne to confess your guilt, in full hopes of obtaining remission of sins, and grace to save you.

2. Every view that you can take of *God the Son*, most strongly encourages you to come to him and confess your sins. Now turn and view the glorious Saviour of a lost world: fasten your eyes upon him; see what wonderful things he hath done for the children of men; and all that he ever did was with this view,—to forgive sins, and to save sinners. *What*

does he do? The Saviour puts on our flesh, and will never put it off: the Son of God becomes the Son of Man, that we might be made the Sons of God. he wears the human nature, that we might be made partakers of the Divine nature: he was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him: he died, that we might live.—See, again, what the Son of God *accomplished* in order to pardon and save us. “He so loved us, that he gave himself for us;” and by the one sacrifice of himself, he made a full and eternal satisfaction for the sins of the whole world: he opened the door of mercy before the greatest sinners: he opened a fountain that will wash away iniquity, and cleanse from all sin: he got all things ready to complete the salvation of all that will believe in his name. Hath the Son of God taken such immense *pains*, and made such wonderful *provisions* for the salvation of sinners? Is it then possible that he can turn a deaf ear to the confession of a penitent, or to the prayers of a sinner that weeps for his salvation? No, impossible. Such is the grace of Christ, that he would rather die a thousand deaths, than to suffer one true penitent to perish at his feet. Such, then, is your ground and encouragement to confess your sins to God. —

3. And every view you can take of *God the Holy Ghost*, in all his glorious offices, operations, and grace, will furnish your souls with the strongest inducements to come and confess your sins before the throne of grace. The Holy Ghost came down from heaven to do a *great work* on the earth.—He came to apply unto

us the salvation which Christ had provided. As Christ has done all for us, so the Holy Ghost is to do all in us. "He worketh all our works in us," both to will and to do. It is he that creates the soul anew, and unites it unto Christ, and gives it life eternal. It is he that enlightens, sanctifies, and comforts all believers. All that we do aright, or truly enjoy, are the fruits of the Spirit.—Now if this Holy Spirit *gives you to see* your perilous condition; to feel your guilt, and to long for reconciliation with your heavenly Father; if he breaks your hard heart, and fills you with godly sorrow for sin, and draws you to the throne of grace to cry for mercy and peace; you have the surest ground to hope for the salvation of God.—If the Holy Spirit leads you as a penitent to *confess* your transgressions before God, it is with the view of giving you remission of sins. If he has given you a heart to pray, he will give you the needful blessings you pray for. If with a penitent heart you cry in faith to God for remission of sins for his Son's sake, he will most assuredly blot out your iniquities as a cloud, and bury them all in eternal oblivion, that you may finally appear without sin unto salvation.

4. For your further encouragement to confess your sins in hopes of mercy, *read the glorious gospel of the blessed God*; study it hard in all its branches: hear what the Lord God saith unto you, and give him boundless credit for all he saith, "for it is impossible for God to lie." When this is done, your conclusion will be this,—that it is the will of God you should repent, to give him room to glorify his grace in your

salvation. Attend first to the *doctrines* of Christ, and the mysteries of Christ, and the unsearchable riches of his grace, displayed in the scheme of redemption and salvation of sinners. Dwell on this till your whole soul is filled with amazement, love, gratitude, and praise. Listen attentively to his gracious *invitations* to sinners:—"If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink;" "Whosoever will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely;" and "Whosoever cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." How inviting and alluring is this voice of the Saviour! And what immense *offers* he makes to all that repent and believe the gospel. He engageth by covenant to give them eternal life, and that they shall never perish: that he will give them the kingdom: and that all things shall be their's. The Lord Jesus in the gospel furnisheth sinners with the most powerful *motives* to come to repentance, that they may be pardoned; and affords unto those that confess their sins, the surest ground to expect forgiveness of sins.—It is utterly impossible to give *stronger* encouragement to come to repentance, or greater assurances of pardon to penitents, than the gospel of Christ affords.

5. Yet, painful to relate, all the allurements of the gospel, all the attractions in Christ Jesus, and all the benefits of salvation *do not win upon all* men to bring them to repentance. No, far from it. There are multitudes of sinners under the constant sound of the gospel, that never felt its power, and were never allured by its grace to come to repentance. These must perish, for God has no higher means to melt their hearts, to

win their souls, and to bring them into his kingdom of salvation.

There are also *true confessors* that have no comfort ; and never can believe that they are in a pardoned state. They cannot believe that their sins are forgiven and blotted out ; because they constantly find that sin, even the body of sin, still liveth in them, and is so troublesome to them, till they are often forced to cry out in distress, “ O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? ” — These *believe the gospel and repent of sin* ; God has forgiven them ; but they cannot forgive themselves. They are safe, yet always trembling : they are in the ark, yet dread the surrounding deluge.

Some are so *truly penitent*, and so established in faith, that they happily enjoy that glorious liberty which the gospel brings, till they triumph always in Christ Jesus. None but diligent souls can rise so high. You will find these daily before the throne confessing their sins, saying, ‘ Father I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies ; yet, O Father, let me have a place in thy family.’

IX.—THE TURNING POINT.

Ver. 20.—*And he arose, and came to his father.*

HE had said, when poverty pressed hard upon him in the far country, “I will arise and go to my Father.” There he made the vow, and now performs it. “He arose and came to his father.” He practised what he purposed; this proves the truth of his resolution; he acts upon it, and performs his promise. He gets up and sets his face towards his father’s house and begins his journey home, and actually comes to his father. So it is written, “He arose, and came to his father.”

Multitudes of sinners under the gospel make the same resolution with the prodigal, *but do not act like him*. They make many fair promises and vows, but never perform them. They resolve, and resolve again, but never rise to come away from the far country.—When the *broken law* thunders its tremendous terrors in their ears, and threatens them with everlasting destruction, they tremble, like Belshazzar at the sight of the hand writing on the wall. Under this terror they promise and vow to leave this land of death, and return unto the Lord. But as soon as their fears and alarms subside, their resolution dies away. Remove the plagues, and Pharaoh’s heart is hardened.—When sinners hear the *joyful sound*, and the glad tidings of the kingdom of God, they are so charmed with the melody of the gospel, that “they receive the word with joy; but having no root, it soon withers away.” In hearing of

the great salvation, and the felicity of those that inherit life eternal, they say with Agrippa, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." The vows they make under these impressions, are like the morning dew that quickly dries away. They say indeed, "I will arise," but this is never done.—When the *heavy hand* of God is upon them; when he lays affliction on their loins; when all is dark and threatening, they say, "We will arise and seek early after God." "Nevertheless, they do but flatter him with their lips, and lie unto him with their tongues." Psalm lxxviii. Remove their troubles, and they will sin yet the more.

Strange to tell, these people *think they have grace* and religion, merely because they formed good resolutions when they were in trouble. They shed tears, felt desires, and entertained hopes; then hastily concluded that all was safe, when all was lost. Let these self-deluded souls know that nothing but actual returning to God, can save them from death. Then, sinners, return, return unto the Lord your God, with your whole heart, and cry mightily unto him, and say, "Turn thou us, good Lord, and so shall we be turned." Should you refuse to do so much as to offer up such a prayer, wonder not that God suffers you to perish in your sin: he hath often warned you, that except you repent, you shall perish—Repentance hath *two parts*. Turning from sin, and turning to God: Departing from all iniquity to serve the living God: To put off the old man, and to put on the new: To rise from death unto life.—It is said here of the prodigal in the first place,

I. "And he *ARÔSE*."

1. The true penitent *riseth up and cometh forth from the regions of the dead*. He leaves the land of death in sin, and comes from death unto life. It is actually a resurrection; it is passing from death unto life—He riseth from under the dominion of sin, to be under the dominion of grace; and from under condemnation into a state of salvation. He riseth from the love of sin to the love of God; from the practice of iniquity to the obedience of Christ; and from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.—Hear what the Lord saith unto the children of his grace, whom he hath “called from darkness into light:” “Ye were afar off, but are now brought nigh; ye were not a people, but are now the people of God; ye were the servants of sin, but now, being made free from sin, ye are become the servants of God, and have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.” Rom. vi. This language proves that they have all arisen, actually come forth from death in sin unto a life of righteousness. The prodigal *arose*; he got up and set off, and departed from the land of death and sin, and came into the land of life.

2. The new-born soul *cannot stay* in the far country. The eyes of his understanding being enlightened, he sees that while he tarries there, he cannot have the bread of life, nor any one spiritual blessing. He sees that the river of life does not flow in this land of death, and that while he tarries here he can have no hope of salvation.—On the contrary, he sees that he has every thing to *fear*. For now he perceives that none abide in this country but those that are enemies unto God:

all that are his friends flee and depart. He seeth that they are all children of disobedience, and children of wrath, under the awful sentence of condemnation. Seeing this, he fleeth and escapeth for his life, lest the wrath of God abide on him.

He cannot stay for this reason also. When the sinner is made alive unto God, *he dies to sin*; the life of Christ in the soul is the death of sin there; the love of God must kill the love of sin. "If we are quickened together with Christ, our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." Rom. vi. When we are made partakers of Christ, and feel the power of his resurrection, we die to sin. "And how shall we that are dead unto sin live any longer therein?" We must necessarily arise, for sin hath lost its dominion.

To abide longer in the far country is impossible for the new born soul, for he begins to have such *views and enjoyments* as allure and constrain him to arise and come away. One believing view of the glory of Christ, eclipses the glory of the world. One view of redeeming love and salvation through grace, captivates the soul, and draws him away after Christ. He soon finds that the ways of the Lord are ways of pleasantness, and his paths, paths of peace. He finds the sabbaths his delights and days of rest to his soul, and the ordinances of God's house like feasts of fat things. Now he understands in some degree what communion with God and with the saints mean, and what it is to have peace and joy in believing. When he receives the earnest of the spirit and the first fruits of the heavenly

land, the hope of glory like the rising sun dawns on his soul, and gives him pleasures which he never knew before. In looking forward to the world to come, the blessed hope and expectation of a glorious immortality enliven and gladden his heart. These refined enjoyments and alluring prospects draw his soul away, and constrain him to arise and go in the new and living way to the Father. Having once tasted that the Lord is gracious, he can no longer stay in the dark dismal land of sin and ruin.

3. Nothing but *actual rising* from sin will do. Whatever comes short of this, will leave us short of salvation. There must be rising from under the love, the dominion, and the service of sin, or we can never rise to heaven. No substitute for this act of leaving sin will ever be accepted. Yet sinners often rest short of this, and trust to something else. They trust to their resolution, their partial reformation, or gospel profession, while at the same time they have not left sin, but live in it. This delusion will destroy the soul.—You would not say of any one thing, ‘this will do for the body, instead of eating and drinking;’ and of what can you say ‘this will do for the soul, instead of leaving sin and going to God?’ You may as well expect your bodies to live without eating and drinking, as to expect your souls to live without rising from sin, and coming out of the land of death. “You must be born of God, and all things must become new.” He that truly repents, leaves his sins, to live in them no more for ever.—It is then high time for every one to ask, ‘Have I departed from all iniquity to serve the living God? Am I now the servant of God-

and not the servant of corruption? Whom do I obey? for his servant I am whom I obey, whether it be sin or Christ, God or mammon.' Many stay in the land of death and shall never see life. But as many as hear the voice of the Son of God come forth; they arise and stand among the living, and live for ever.

II. AND HE CAME TO HIS FATHER.

1. The sinner left God, now he *returns to God*. How very different the effects of sin and grace in the human heart! they counteract each other in all things, and agree in nothing; but seek the destruction of each other. One descends from heaven, the other ascends from hell, and meet in man on earth. Where two such opposite principles inhabit the same heart, there must be war, which can terminate only in the death of one of the parties. See how *contrary* their influence and operations in man. Sin separates man and God, grace unites them. Sin sends man away from God, grace restores him and brings him back again. When the prodigal had only sin in his heart and nature, he wandered and rebelled, and he never would have thought of returning, but would have wandered endlessly. When grace was implanted, he immediately began to think of his father's house, resolved to go back: "and he arose and came to his father."

2. He had *no where else to go*. God in Christ is the only refuge for a sinner: destruction meets him every where else; but here perfect safety. Many, in their distress, seek for shelter in the creature, in their own righteousness, in their reformation, and their religion; but upon trial they find them all nothing but refuges of lies, and

physicians of no value. When the deluge came, there was not one place of safety but within the ark. When the world is fallen into a lost state, the sinner can find no refuge, no place of defence and safety but in the Saviour. "There is salvation in no other, nor any name under heaven given, whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus," and every believer will say, "The Lord is my rock and my fortress, and my deliverer: my God, my strength, in whom I will trust: my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower." Psalm xviii. 2.

3. The prodigal got up, set his face directly towards his father's house, and begun the way home. Not only begun and went a day's journey, and then halted and rested there; no, "He came to his father." *He came quite home.*—So must every penitent returning sinner act. He must come home to God. This numbers of professors never do. They do something in religion; nay, like Herod, when he heard John, "they do many things," but not enough to be saved; therefore might as well do nothing. Orpha might as well tarry in Moab, as to go part of the way to Canaan, and then turn back to her country and to her gods. Professors may as well make no profession, if they stop short of Christ. Many come out of Egypt and never enter Canaan, but perish in the wilderness through unbelief. Many put on the garment of profession, who never rend their hearts and turn unto the Lord their God. "If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, return *unto* me." Jer. iv. 1. However far we travel in religion, or high we mount in appearance, if any thing, after all, stands between

us and Christ, we are still in death. In him is life, and we must be in him: We must dwell in God, and God in us, or we are at best nothing better than fine pictures on the wall: these may appear beautiful, but there is no breath in them. There is no life in us till we live in Christ. To be placed at the side of the heavenly vine is useless; we must be ingrafted into it, and made one with Christ and Christ with us. The members must be in the body, or be dead members. So then, every true penitent comes quite home to his father. He rests no where till he rests in Christ.

4. Have *we ourselves* thus returned unto the Lord? This is the same as inquiring whether we are in the way to heaven or to destruction. This is the turning point on which our eternal state depends. If we are come home to God, all is safe. Then the point is, are we come to him in truth? Have we returned unto the Lord with our *whole heart*? The highest reformation of our lives, without a change of heart, only makes us like whited sepulchres. The brightest lamp of profession, without the reign of grace in the soul, will leave us at last among the foolish virgins, who find no admittance into the heavenly kingdom. The grandeur of our building is no security to us in time of tempests and of floods, if built on the sand. And in vain shall we plead that our creed is pure gospel, while it does not transform us into the likeness of Christ. We are no trees of God's planting, if we produce not the fruits of the Spirit. "He is a Jew who is a Jew inwardly:" and he is a Christian that is a Christian in his heart. "My son, give me thine heart, saith the

Lord;" where this is denied, he will accept of nothing else. Should we give all our goods to feed the poor, and our bodies to be burned, we are nothing without the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost.—Then are our hearts *returned* unto the Lord in truth? Do we love him above all treasures, relations, and life? "To you that believe he is precious:" the invaluable pearl; in comparison of whom all worlds are but as dust on the scale. And if you have given the Lord your hearts, you have given him your *lives* also; and can say in truth, "For me to live is Christ." They who return unto the Lord in truth, return both in heart and life. So they come to their father's house.

5. The prodigal came *without delay* to his father. He did not talk about what he should do hereafter, but instantly aros^e, and came to his father. But why so expeditious? Why?—His very life, even his *eternal life* is in the most imminent danger. He knows now that while he keeps away from his father, the wrath of God abideth on him. It is high time then to make haste, when he finds himself in such a perilous situation, and encompassed with such dangers. He makes haste home, because it is on a *most important errand*, no less than the vast concerns of the eternal world. If he stays a little while longer where he is, endless torments must inevitably be his portion to drink; but if he returns to his father, heaven, with all the glory of heaven, will be settled upon him for his inheritance for ever. No wonder then he makes such mighty haste.—Besides this, he hurries away because he knows the *uncertainty*

of time: he knows that he may, any day, rise with the sun and set before it: that life may go in a moment. Then, saith he, I will go this very day to my father, and dare not delay till to-morrow, for this night my soul may be required of me. To loiter one day longer may cost me the loss of a kingdom.

Nothing so *hazardous as to delay* turning from sin to God. This numbers do, and through presumption perish everlastingly. They presume on their *future repentance*. But how can they expect to hate hereafter the sins they now so dearly love? And how can they expect God to continue unto them always the grace which they so long rejected and despised? The Spirit of God often strives with them, and convinceth them of sin and danger. Should they resist his operations, till they cause him to depart from them, then repentance, without his influence, will be a thing impossible.—Sinners that delay turning from sin to God, presume on the *mercy* of God. The mercies of God truly are infinite, and they who come to him, need not despair. But you who keep away have no favour to expect; pardoning mercy can no where be found but by fleeing to Christ; where this is neglected, it is high presumption to look for pardon.—Besides, going on in sin because God is so merciful, is the highest insult that can be offered him, and the most effectual way to turn his mercy into wrath. For you say in fact, the better God is, the more I shall offend him. Hear what the Lord saith: “My Spirit shall not always strive with man.” And when his Spirit is withdrawn, mercy is gone for ever, and thy lot is sealed. See Prov. i. 24—33,

Therefore, to-day arise and go to thy Father to obtain mercy.

6. What does this penitent prodigal go to his Father *for*? He goes to make a free and full *confession* of his heinous offences, and to cry for mercy and pardon: he goes to *throw* himself on the multitude of God's tender mercies. When he has not one plea to offer in defence of his own conduct, he ventures on the bosom of his Father's love.—He goes home to seek for *reconciliation* with his injured and offended Lord.—This, he now most ardently desires above all things; knowing that happiness is impossible till he is at peace with God, and restored into favour. He comes back to receive a kingdom; Heb. xii. 28; to be *reinstated* in his forfeited inheritance. And this the Lord does with every sinner that truly returns to him; he constitutes them heirs of all things, of the promises, of salvation, and the glory to come. "If sons, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ." He comes back to his Father's house that he may *share of the felicity* of his happy family.

While *prostrating* at the door of mercy he cries aloud, "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance." Psalm cvi. 4, 5. He comes home to be *educated* under the instruction and inspiration of the Holy Ghost; to be qualified for the kingdom prepared for him; to be arrayed with the garments of salvation; to be washed in the fountain

of life; and so to be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. He comes home, to go away no more; but to *abide* in the house of the Lord for ever. When he enters in and finds himself enfolded in his Father's arms of love, "who rejoiceth over him with joy and singing," and poureth his blessings upon him, he saith, "here will I dwell for ever." I call heaven and earth to witness, that I will never more forsake my God.

III. We conclude this stage with the following REMARKS.

1. The day of the soul's *regeneration* is a most remarkable day. A day to be had in everlasting remembrance, and never to be forgotten; for in that day a soul is born of God,—born an heir of heaven, —born to live for ever. The conversion of a sinner is one of the most marvellous events that takes place in this lower world. An enemy is made the friend of God, a rebel made a loyal subject, and a child of wrath made the child of grace: here a new creation is produced, he is created anew in Christ Jesus, and in him all things become new. It is a resurrection from the dead; he leaves the regions of the dead, and comes forth into the land of life, to live for ever. The dead that hear the voice of the Son of God shall live and never die; they pass from death unto life, and shall never return to condemnation. In the day that a sinner is converted, one more is added to the family of God; one pillar more is erected to perpetuate the grace of Christ in salvation: one temple more is prepared for an habitation of God through the Spirit; and one additional gem is set in the

Saviour's crown. The longer we look at the conversion of a sinner to God, the more we see to astonish and delight us.—We see a sun rising that will never set, but shall shine for ever in the firmament of heaven;—we see one who very narrowly escaped the torments of the bottomless pit, beginning his way home to God to share of the triumphs of eternity.—We view with great delight the safe state and happy condition of the new-born soul. He dwells in life; he dwells in the love of God; he dwells in Christ; he has taken refuge under the wings of the Almighty, and hid himself in the clefts of the rock of ages; he has entered into the ark which no deluge can overflow or sink. He is safe enough in his God, for underneath him are the everlasting arms, and around him he has God as a wall of fire. Christians may well say, “We have a strong city, salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. The Lord Jehovah is our sun and shield, and hiding place, of whom then shall we be afraid? Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.”

2. There are immense *difficulties* in the sinner's way to return to his Father. It is truly marvellous that one sunk so low can ever rise so high: it is a miracle of mercy that any can come forth from such tremendous depths of sin and misery, to stand at God's right hand in heaven. Let us view some of the main difficulties in the sinner's way to heaven.

His *sins* are innumerable, and all these, like so many mountains of brass, stand between him and his father's house. He cannot get over them, or go by them; they

must be removed out of his way, or he can never return home. To remove them is impossible till full atonement is first made for every sin ; and it is impossible for man to find that sacrifice that will make atonement. All the sacrifices which the whole world could offer would not satisfy for one sin.—Here is the tremendous difficulty : Sin must be atoned for, but man cannot do it ; and yet it must be done, or man must die. The Son of God looked on this difficulty till his compassion overflowed heaven, and burst in torrents down to the earth. He cried, “ Lo, I come ! ” He came and removed the mountains of brass, which flowed down at his presence, Isa. lxiv. 1. “ Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.” He levels the mountains, and makes a way in the wilderness for his ransomed people to return home.

Man's *vileness* is a strong barrier in his way home. How can the Holy Father receive him ? The leprosy of Naaman and Miriam made them vile ; yet their defilement was cleanliness compared with the defilement of sin in the fallen soul. A leper before he is cleansed, may be admitted into the favour of his Maker, but a sinner cannot. Sin is an infinite evil, and of the most defiling nature. When it first touched the angels in heaven, the Holy God could not for a moment endure them in his presence, but banished them for eternity to an infinite distance. When sin fell on the garden of Eden it soon spread, polluted and cursed the whole earth, and brought death into the world. Were it to touch suns and stars, they would shine no more. What, then, shall we think of man,

who is nothing but sin. "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint : from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it ; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores," Isa. i. 5, 6. He is all over unclean, no part free, even the marrow in his bones is polluted.—How, then, can a sinner so defiled ever approach an infinitely pure and holy God ? This is the difficulty ; and a difficulty which man can never surmount. The waters of Jordan cleansed Naaman of his leprosy ; but all the rivers in the world cannot wash away sin : No, nor could the repentance and tears of eternity do it. The wit of all men and angels could never devise means to cleanse the soul or body from one sin : and yet they must all be washed away, or going home to the Father will be for ever impossible.—In the midst of this immense difficulty the Son of God came forth and opened a fountain for sin and uncleanness : a fountain that can wash away the sins of the world, yea, many worlds : a fountain of life, that gives life, and preserves life for ever : a fountain of living waters, of which if a man drink he shall never die. This all-healing river now flows in Sion : no sins nor defilement can stand before its current. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." The very vilest can be made clean here ; so clean that God can spy no spot in them : " Though their sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow : " " And they shall appear without sin unto salvation ; " " having washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."—There, sinner, go ; wash and be clean, and so return to thy Father.

Another prodigious difficulty in the sinner's way to return, is the *hardness* of his heart. Sin hath made the heart of man harder than adamant. Of this we have the most abundant proofs in multitudes that call themselves Christians:—they can make a *mock* at sin, and play with the sting of death: though sin hath separated between them and their God, murdered the Lord of glory, and sent millions down to hell, yet they will caress it in their bosom and defy heaven:—What extreme hardness is this! They can read the whole history of *redemption*, and listen to a thousand sermons on redeeming love, the groans of Gethsemane, and the death of Calvary, without emotion. When Jesus died, the sun blushed, the rocks rent, the earth quaked; but man was unmoved before the cross, and reviled the dying Redeemer.—What hardness can exceed this! Thousands of sinners act as if they *cared not what is to become of them*. They know that they must soon put on immortality, yet to prepare for a happy eternity seems the least of all in their concerns; as if they were willing to lose heaven, and be confined in hell for ever. They will not do so much to secure everlasting glory, and escape endless torments, as to pray and seek after God, or accept of the offered salvation.—What hardness can equal this!—What can *melt and break* this heart of stone! Many have been pounded in the mortar for scores of years, and continued callous as ever. All the plagues of Egypt could not soften the heart of Pharaoh; nor can all the torments of the deep effect it. Sinners drink daily of the rivers of God's goodness and mercy;

yet continue full of enmity and pride, and lift up their heels against heaven. What, then, can conquer and subdue the heart of man? Alexander conquered the world; but his heart conquered him. The rod of Moses had dominion over the air, the earth, the sea; but had no dominion over the human heart. He struck the rock once, it melted, and the waters flowed withal; but a thousand strokes on the heart leave it hard as adamant. It is easier to break the rock than to break the heart. Nothing but the *application of the blood of Jesus* by the Holy Ghost can ever soften and break the sinner's heart. The love of God in the soul can alone destroy enmity. God himself must speak, or man will never believe. They only who hear the voice of the Son of God shall live. When the word comes in the Holy Ghost, it comes in power, and breaks and melts the heart. When the Prodigal recollected his Father's character, and the felicity of his family, he hastened home.

3. Very marvellous is the *way* in which the sinner returns home to his Father.—It is a new *way*, and such as no man could devise: eternal wisdom planned it. It must be a new way; for, till now, there was no way for a sinner to come back to his God. All doors were for ever shut against him. The great Redeemer prepared a new way to the Father; and opened a new door in heaven; a door which none can close against the returning sinner. The way in which the penitent returns is the way of *life* and salvation; the only way that leads to glory and a happy immortality: all others lead to death and hell. This new and living way is

kept open for returning sinners: this new door in heaven is kept wide open to receive penitents. Whosoever will, may go up this new way to the Father; and go in through the new door into the city of God.—The new way is that of salvation through the *mediation* of Immanuel, God in the flesh. The returning sinner goes home to his Father in the merits of Christ, and is kindly received; in his righteousness, and the law cannot condemn him; in his strength, and the world cannot overcome him.—This is called “the way *everlasting*,” because there never will be another way of salvation. Jesus tells us plainly, “No man can come to the Father but by me:” “I am the way,” the only way, to God and to glory.—But we must be *in* the way, or cannot be saved. To extol, profess, and applaud it, will profit nothing; and to be near it will be no security: we must come into the way; we must be in Christ. They who clung to the outside of the ark, perished, like those that never heard of it. Every branch, not in the vine, withereth away and is burned. But they that are members of Christ, and one with him, dwell in life and shall never perish: for “there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit,” Rom. viii. 1. *Such* is the wondrous way in which the Prodigal returns to his Father’s house, and the city of God.

4. What *depends* upon his returning home? It is a point on which his eternal all turns. Keep away, and you die eternally; return, and you live for ever. If the possession of an earthly crown, a throne, and an

empire, were under uncertainty to one that laid claim to them, it would fill him with the deepest anxiety : but here, the possession of the crown of life, the throne of heaven, and the kingdom of God, depends on your coming home to your Father's house. These are things of immense value : their value will be better understood after they have been enjoyed, or lost, for millions of ages yet to come.—On what *easy terms* you may now secure to yourself the everlasting possession of the crown, the throne, and the kingdom of heaven, and inherit the exceeding great and eternal weight of glory ! On what terms may all this be obtained ? Were it at the price of suffering in hell for millions of ages, it would be exceeding cheap. But mind, they are offered to you on far easier terms : only come home to your Father's house, and all are your's for ever. “ Return unto me, saith the Lord, and I will return unto you.” Only come home, and you shall be my children ; and I will be your God and Father for evermore.—This, then, is the grand turning point : on this depends your eternal state.—Keep far from God, you die ; return in truth, and you live for ever.

X.—THE COMPASSIONATE FATHER.

Ver. 20.—*But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.*

1. The Prodigal is now in a *state of grace*, restored to life, and in the way home to the Father eternal. He is born of the Spirit, and created anew in Christ Jesus.—He gives a full proof that he is alive from the dead: that he is under the dominion of grace; and that his heart is changed. The proofs are these: He departs from all iniquity; he separates from his wicked companions; and is coming home to his father.—These things sufficiently prove that he is brought into a new state, and is under the influence of a new principle. The dead old heart will never come into the new and living way. The evil heart of unbelief will ever depart from the living God: the new heart alone will draw nigh to God. The prodigal begins to draw nigh, therefore it is evident that a new heart, to know the Lord, is given unto him. Sin draws away: grace alone can draw us back to God. The prodigal is now coming to him: then the prodigal is under grace.—Had he been *left to himself* to follow the bent of his own fallen nature, he never would have returned; nature is nothing but evil and weakness: It is grace that restores the sinner. “For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God,” Eph. ii. 8. No man cometh unto the Father but by Christ. And

no man cometh unto Christ till the Father draweth him. The prodigal is now drawn to God through Christ, therefore he is under grace.

2. Yet hitherto, he is *afar off*. Though he is alive in Christ, reconciled to the Father, and adopted into his family, yet in one important sense he is still *afar off*.—A very great way off from *perfection* in grace: nothing more yet than a new-born babe; then very far from arriving at the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. He is a great way off from the *mark*, the state which God designs to bring him into at last; and that is, to be every way like Christ, perfectly holy and happy. Even Paul fell himself far short of this when he said, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that, for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,” Phil. iii. 12—14. If Paul was a great way off, this new convert is much farther. We are all *afar off*. “While we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord:” And can only see him yet through a glass, darkly and distantly.

3. True Christians *lament* nothing more deeply than their distance from their God, therefore the church for ever cries, “Draw me, draw me.” “Come Lord Jesus, come. The Spirit and the bride say come.” Distance from God is misery to the Christian: for there darkness covers him, and in that darkness fear and trem-

bling lay hold upon him till he cries out, "How long, Lord, wilt thou hide thyself for ever? Shall thy wrath burn like fire?" Psalm lxxxix. 46. Return, O Lord, return, and be not absent from me for ever.—Though Christians mourn because of their great distance from the Lord, yet let them *rejoice* with exceeding great joy, that they are brought into the way which leads to the Father. Here rejoice with trembling. Tremble at the immense distance between you and your God; yet rejoice that you have even begun the way home to him. To take the first step is a favour that never can be sufficiently valued.—Let those who are in the way go *forward*, and press towards the mark, and rest not till they rest in glory. Gratitude to God who brought you into the way, demands that you should proceed. And your own interest cry to you aloud, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." As you have begun the way, finish it, go home to your Father's house. You have received the earnest, get the inheritance: you have tasted the manna, go on to the eternal feast.

I. His Father *saw* him. He saw him indeed at a very great distance, though in the way home. The seed of grace is far from the crown of glory. The brink of the pit is very distant from the throne of heaven. And this penitent has but just set his face towards Zion, yet the father noticed even this in his penitent son.

God takes notice of the *very commencement* of the new creation in the soul, and marks the first dawn of grace on the heart. He cannot do otherwise, for it is

the work of his own blessed Spirit. The all-seeing eye of God is fixed on the returning sinner the moment he begins to set his face towards his father's house. He marks the first serious thought; the first secret groan; and the first penitential tear. He sees the first time the knee is bent in prayer: the first time the eyes are lifted up to heaven; and the first step the feet take towards home. Jesus saith to Nathanael, "I saw thee when thou wert under the fig-tree." These things may escape the attention of all but God alone: he noticeth it, and writes it in his book of remembrance. The penitent himself, at this early stage, may have no suspicion that he begins the way to the kingdom of heaven, but the Lord knows whereunto these small beginnings will grow at the last.

It is a day of very *small things* with the new-born soul when he enters the world of grace. He is verily but a babe in Christ: he is perfect weakness, and every grace in him is feebleness itself. His eyes are too weak to stand the light: his ears cannot hear, his heart cannot understand, and his tongue cannot speak plain. He has not strength to walk or to stand.—In this state of weakness, the eyes of the Lord are upon him. His heavenly Father does not despise this day of small things, any more than a mother would despise her helpless babe, which can only weep to excite compassion. Even Pharaoh's daughter could not resist the tears of the child Moses. When she opened the basket floating on the stream, the babe wept, and she had compassion on his helpless infancy; how much more ready is our God to pity helpless sinners that can only weep for mercy?

. When babes in grace can do no more, the Lord will hear their cry, and shew them all tender compassion ; he will support them on his knees, and carry the lambs in his bosom. And more, he will nourish his children with the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby. He will provide them with necessities when ready to die with hunger and thirst. Mothers may forget their children, but God never can. In perilous times he will do with them as Jehosheba did with Joash, he will hide them in his pavilion till the danger is gone by.

2. The Lord sets the *greatest value* on the least grace ; it may be so small that the man himself does not see it, nor suspect that he has any. But the Lord seeth it, and highly values the least spark of grace, because it is *connected with the greatest things*. An atom of light is in itself insignificant and invisible, but in union with the sun, and making a part of the sun-beams, it becomes truly great and brilliant. A spark of grace considered in itself, is like a spark of fire, too feeble to set the flax on flame ; but in union with Christ, it is fully sufficient to save the soul for ever.—The smallest degree of true and saving grace is connected with the *great salvation of God*, and forms a part of it ; however small this beginning of salvation may be, God the Saviour will not despise the day of small things. The room which the point of a pin takes is truly small, yet it is connected with the immensity of space, and becomes a part of the whole, and in that view may be considered immensely great. Grace in the soul at its commencement, is like a grain of mustard seed ; yet it

is the seed of life eternal, the beginning of the kingdom of heaven, and unites the believing soul with all the glory to come. Who, then, can estimate the value of the dawn of divine grace in the immortal soul? It leads to, and secures, the highest enjoyment of God through an endless duration.—Then, “Have grace.”

3. The Lord greatly values the buddings of grace, because he sees at first whereunto it will grow, and *how great it will be at the last*. A drop of dew on the top of a mountain is truly small, but it soon blends itself with the rain that descends from the cloud, and glides into a brook; the brook becomes a river; and the river empties itself into the sea; and now the drop of dew is blended with the great waters of the sea. What was insignificant in its origin is great now, when made one with the ocean itself. Grace will thus gradually expand, till the least spark of it grows to an “exceeding great and eternal weight of glory.”—Pious groans which cannot be uttered, will terminate in eternal triumphs: sighs of godly sorrow, will issue in endless hallelujahs: glimmering views of Jesus, will increase till we see him face to face in the midst of the throne: sacred thirst for the waters of life, will lead on the soul till it drinks of the rivers of pleasures in Paradise: holy longings after God, will grow till we enter into the joy of the Lord: the least spark of divine love, will, by degrees, burn into a vehement flame, which no floods can drown.—Here below we hear but a faint *resemblance* of the glorious Saviour; but, when he appeareth, we shall be *like* him, and with him for ever. The momentary communion we have

with God here, is an earnest of the eternal inheritance of the saints in light. The very first step we take towards home, is, by a strong chain, connected with that which will conduct us into the realms of endless bliss. We in our blindness are prone to *undervalue* the first operations of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, because all appear to us nothing but perfect weakness and confusion; but God seeth that out of this rude chaos will arise a glorious new creation, far more brilliant than the starry heaven.

II. When the father saw his son beginning the way home, he had *compassion* on him, and *ran* to meet him. "His eye affected his heart." When he saw his misery, he pitied his condition.

First, He had *compassion* on him. Suppose a kind and tender-hearted father had a son that acted every way like this prodigal: one that was self-willed and would bear no restraint; that wandered far from home and lived in all wickedness and extravagance; that endured the greatest privation and hardship; and, not heard of for many years, was given up for lost:—but when all hopes of ever seeing him again were vanished, he *appears*, and comes home as a true penitent, but in a most deplorable condition. The very sight of him deeply affects the father's heart; his whole soul melts with tender compassion and pity; yet mixed with joy that cannot be expressed, in finding that his son is yet alive and reformed.—Old *Jacob's* heart overflowed with joy that overpowered nature, when he heard that his son Joseph was yet alive: he cried in raptures, "It is enough; Joseph, my son, is yet alive: I will go and

see him before I die." A parent's heart soon relents and melts into tears.—"As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." His pity and compassion so far exceed that of an earthly parent, as the heavens are higher than the earth. No Father ever felt such tender compassion towards his suffering child, as God does towards every penitent sinner that weeps at Mercy's door. When God sees transgressors returning home,

1. He has compassion on their *most miserable condition*. They have been wandering among thieves and robbers and murderers, who stripped them of their ornaments, and robbed them of all their treasures. They have lost the greatest things, and lost them all. They have lost the life of God from their soul; lost his image, spirit, and his love. They come home truly in a most deplorable state; "wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:" they starve for want of bread, and perish with hunger. There is not ~~one~~ spark of true felicity left; all is gone; and they have not a friend in all creation that can supply their need. God looks at them in this forlorn state, and has compassion on them; his bowels of tender mercies yearn over them; and his hand of grace is stretched out to supply their wants, and to deliver them out of their miseries.

2. The eternal Father takes compassion also on the *deep distress of mind* which true penitents generally feel when they begin the way home.—When the Holy Spirit convinceth them of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come, they tremble and quake. Their sins

now appear of enormous magnitude, and numerous as the sand. Under a sense of their immense guilt, they cry in the bitterness of their souls, ‘How shall I appear before the Holy Lord God, who “is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity?” Whither can I flee? Where can a refuge be found for a sinner like me? “God will by no means clear the guilty:” What hopes, then, can I entertain, who am nothing but guilt?’—Under this deep sense of guilt, the sinner expects nothing but *condemnation* and death eternal. If Belshazzar trembled so exceedingly at seeing the hand-writing on the wall, how must the awakened sinner tremble with horror, when he looks at the hand of Divine Justice sealing his death warrant! In viewing the horrors of the day of judgment, and the torments of eternity, the trembling sinner sinks into an agony of distress, and cries, ‘There is my bitter lot: Heaven is lost for ever, and hell prepared for my portion. Wo is me, that I have sinned against heaven!’ God looks with *eyes of pity* on such penitents, and his heart overflows with compassion towards them, and he runs swiftly to their relief. The good Samaritan soon pours wine and oil into their bleeding wounds; and God speaks comfortably to them in this melting, cheering strain, ‘Sinner, “Behold the Lamb of God, whose blood cleanseth from all sin.” I have laid help on one, almighty to save: one that receiveth sinners, even the greatest sinners. Look to him and live: believe in him, and all thy sins shall be freely forgiven. Fear not; I am thy salvation.’

3. The returning penitent finds *ready pardon* when

he comes to prostrate himself before the Father of mercies, and the God of all grace. On his return, his transgressions, however great, are not once mentioned. Though he has rebelled with a high hand against heaven, abused the greatest kindness, and provoked the Lord to anger; yet the Lord will not retain his anger for ever. No sooner does the sinner melt in penitence, than God melts in mercy, and lays his anger by, and saith to the weeping penitent, "Be of good cheer, fury is not in me; thy sins are forgiven thee, go in peace." The penitent longs for salvation, and cries aloud for mercy; but greatly fears that such a transgressor shall obtain no mercy. He weeps, and groans, and trembles, and saith, "I am ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I bear the reproach of my youth." God heareth this lamentation, noticeth this contrition, and saith, "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still, therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord," Jer. xxxi.

Secondly, He *ran*.—The son moves slowly, the father makes haste. The Lord is more anxious to shew mercy, than the sinner, in the depth of misery, is to accept of mercy. God is more ready to impart his blessings, than we are to ask for them. Let the broken-hearted penitent, who weeps at Mercy's door, know to his comfort, that he will find no more difficulty to prevail on the Lord to receive him and take care of him, than Pharaoh's daughter found to persuade Moses's mother to become the nurse of her own beloved babe.

Where God gives birth, he will give nourishment and protection. He is not like the ostrich, that forsakes her young; but like the hen, that gathers her brood under her wings and feeds them with tender care. The Lord will nourish and bring up his children: his kindness to them is immense. Yet hear, O heavens, and give ear O earth; the Lord Jehovah has often to complain, and say, "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me," Isa. i. 2. —Why then does the Father *run* to meet returning penitents?

1. Because his *delight* is very great in seeing them returning home. What does the Lord require of sinners? He does not require of them to save themselves; to atone for their transgressions; nor to purify their own depraved nature: he does not ask of them to mend their condition, and render themselves worthy of his favour. He no more requires these things at their hands, than he requires of them to redeem the world or purchase heaven. His requirement is simply this,—*Return home*, that I may do all things for you and in you. This is all he asks of perishing sinners, "Return unto the Lord your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul;" receive the Saviour, embrace his salvation, surrender yourselves to the government of his grace, walk in his holy ways and be happy. See what *pains* the Lord takes to restore sinners to himself; what great provisions he makes for their reception; how earnestly he intreats them to return; and what exceeding great and precious promises he holds out to all that will accept of his offers and invitations. This

proves that our returning is a very great point with God. Yet such is the state and character of man, that not one will *move a step* toward home, till their hearts are created anew, and brought under the reign of grace, and drawn by the cords of divine love. Such is the testimony of Jesus, who saith, "No man cometh unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." God *runs* to meet those that do return, and rejoices over them with great joy, for now he has his end; the end he had in view when he sent his Son into the world. It was to bring sinners home.

2. The Father makes haste to meet his returning son, because he sees his child cruelly *assaulted* by the enemy, and suffering the most painful temptations.—*Satan tells him*, 'Thou art my servant, my subject, and my soldier: thou wert born in my dominions, and hast served my cause, and fought under my banner from thy youth up until now. Why rebel? return, or thou shalt suffer the punishment of a deserter.' The penitent feels that this *charge is too true*. At the recollection of the service he rendered unto Satan, he trembles, and weeps, and sinks: "And when he thinks upon God, he is troubled;" his guilty conscience tortures him, and saith, What can a rebel like me expect at the hand of the Lord, but the punishment of a criminal? Here the new convert stands *trembling* and desponding. He dares not return to take Satan's side against God; he dreads to go forward, fearing that God will punish him with death for past offences. The sufferings of such a state are such as none can conceive, but those who have themselves passed through

this dark valley. This in general is a period of *peculiar trials*, and severe conflicts: faith is weak, and corruptions strong: hopes and fears struggle for victory; the soul's eternal all appears in a doubtful scale: here the soul often drinks deep of the waters of Mara, and feeds on wormwood and gall. The compassionate Father is not an *indifferent spectator* of such a scene as this, any more than a parent would look with unconcern on his drowning child struggling for the land. No; he feels deeply for their afflictions: he runs, he flies to their relief: he makes haste to administer cordials to their fainting souls. By a still, small voice, yet powerful, he whispers in their hearts, "I am become thy salvation; fear not, I am thy God."

3. The Father runs not only to remove the painful fears of his returning children, but also to *administer comforts* unto them, and to encourage them to come forward to their father's house.—This he does by opening their eyes to see the Saviour and to know him: by giving them hearts to believe in him and rest on his salvation: and by giving them to experience in their own souls, the power of his grace, and the hope of glory.—These are the things, and these alone, that *will draw* our hearts home to God, and place our souls on the mount of joy. What but a view of the glory of Christ that produced the transports of mount Tabor? What but believing views of Jesus that draws sinners home to the Father? What but heart knowledge of the Son of God is life eternal to the soul?—This then is *God's way* of administering comfort to weeping penitents. He shews them his Son Jesus. He shines into

their hearts and gives them to see the glory of God in the face of Christ. And when they know him, they can rest their salvation upon him. "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee." And when they trust him they go on rejoicing towards their father's house.—It is to give his children this happy *experience* that the father runs to meet them at their coming. The Lord does not give his children all the knowledge of Christ in a *day*, any more than the master gives his pupils knowledge of all sciences in a day. But he leads them on from one degree of faith to more. As they feed their souls on the word of life, and behold the Lamb in the glass of the gospel, they grow in the knowledge of Christ Jesus. And as they grow in the knowledge of Christ, they are transformed into the same image from glory to glory; and so advance in happiness and meetness for heaven.—So then God *runs* to meet his children because he is glad to see them coming home; he is in haste to defend them from danger, and to administer comfort and encouragement unto them.—To hear all this will avail us nothing, except we ourselves return and experience it in our way home to God.

III. "He fell on his neck and *kissed* him."

These are expressions of the inconceivable *delights* which Jehovah takes in those sinners that truly turn unto him. He pities his very enemies; he has compassion on wicked sufferers; but he delights in none but those that come home to him. Jesus pitied the wicked Pharisees, wept over Jerusalem, and prayed for his murderers. He rises far higher with his disciples;

he loves them with a love of delights, as objects of his joy.—The pleasure and delight which Jehovah takes in every sinner that returns home to him, are inexpressibly great; and on this ground—

1. They come home *in Christ Jesus*, and are made one with him, and he with them. They have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man. They dwell in Christ, and Christ in them: they are clothed with his righteousness and cleansed by his blood, and exalted into heavenly places in Christ Jesus. What better things, save in degrees, can be said of the highest in heaven, than is said of the lowest in grace? They are in Christ; they have vital union with him, since they have believed in his name. God now looks on them in his Son, and then takes infinite delight in them: Jesus saith of them to his Father, “Thine they were, and thou gavest them me, and I gave them the words of eternal life: I have manifested thy name unto them: and the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them, therefore thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me,” John xvii.—Here is the ground of the Father’s great delight in returning sinners, they come home in Christ: in his name, in his merits, in his spirit, and in his love. They are made partakers of the divine nature, members of Christ, and coheirs with him. Therefore the father “falls on their necks and kisseth them.”

2. Again, God delights in returning sinners because they are led home *by his Spirit*. “And as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God,” Rom. viii. 14: In regeneration, the soul is born of the

Spirit, and so becomes a child of God.—All true converts are under the influence and dominion of the Holy Ghost. The unconverted are described as “not knowing the Spirit,” and “if any have not the Spirit of Christ, they are none of his :” they do not belong to him.—The Spirit of God dwelleth in the children of grace, to guide and govern them ; to instruct and to strengthen them ; to feed and defend them ; to sanctify and to save them. The Spirit abideth in them to carry on his new creation ; to build them up in their most holy faith ; and to comfort them in all their tribulations. He dwelleth in them as the Spirit of grace and supplication ; the Spirit of faith and love ; the Spirit of self-denial, humility, and the fear of the Lord. All the productions of the new creature are the fruits of the Spirit.—When God views these coming towards him under the influence and leadings of his own Spirit, he runs to meet them, and embraceth them with arms of love and delight.

3. The Lord meets them also with gladness and joy, on account of the *triumphs of his grace* in them.—In every converted soul, grace overcomes hosts of enemies, mountains of difficulties, and worlds of oppositions. Grace does mighty wonders in those that return to God. In the first instance, grace breaks the *bands of death*, and sets the prisoners free, and brings them forth into the glorious liberty of the children of the resurrection. By nature we are tied and bound with the chains of our sins, which are numerous and strong : by faith in Christ we break through them all, and come forth into the land of life.—Grace enables the believer in

Jesus to overcome *Satan*, and all his wiles and temptations; to subdue principalities and powers, and force his way home to his God and Father.—By grace the returning sinner overcomes the *world*, and all that is in the world. Its allurements are numerous and fascinating; its snares strong and concealed; yet they who believe in Jesus break through them all, and travel on to God, and sing, “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”—Grace does more yet, it overcomes *self*, and subdues the body of sin within us; it kills the love of sin and kindles the love of God; it weans our hearts from the earth and sets our affections on things above.—In a word, when the grace of God is implanted in the heart, that soul will break through ten thousand difficulties that stand in his way to his Father’s house. God is delighted to see the triumphs of his grace in the returning sinner,—runs in haste to meet him; “falleth on his neck and kisseth him.”

IV. In regeneration, *God and man meet*.

1. They meet *in Christ*; they meet in peace and love; and they meet to part no more for ever. The day the soul is born of God is a day of wonders: for in that very day “he passeth from death into life;” is brought into a pardoned state; reconciled to God; introduced into his family; adopted as a child, and constituted an heir of heaven.—God now entereth into *covenant* of peace with him; a covenant that shall never be broken, which runs thus, “I will be thy God, and thou shalt be my child,” from this day forth and for evermore. This covenant he binds with a sacred oath, and seals it in the blood of his Son.—And

to *satisfy* the returning sinner, that he meets him in peace and love, “ he falleth on his neck and kisseth him ; ” that is, gives him many tokens that his sins are forgiven, and his soul saved, such as these ; he sheds his love abroad in his heart, and gives his soul to enjoy the hope of glory. He gives him his Spirit to dwell in his heart and to sanctify it, and to draw his affections to God and to the children of his grace ; to follow after holiness, and to delight in the ways of the Lord. These are the kisses or tokens which the Father gives to his returning son, to assure him of his love.

2. How *blessed and happy* are the people who have returned home ; who have their sins forgiven ; and have the Lord for their God.—They are in a state of eternal *safety* ; “ kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.” Babies in the ark are perfectly safe ; they may tremble, but they are out of danger, for, “ There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.”—As soon as they return to the Father, he gives them a *right* to the tree of life ; to the salvation of Jesus, and to the kingdom of heaven ; and saith to them, “ All things are yours ; for ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.” God constitutes them his heirs ; “ If children, then heirs, heirs of God.” Then “ great must be their inheritance in heaven.”—They enjoy much on the *earth*. They alone can say, “ Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.” Our conversation is in heaven, and our hearts are there. They have the *hope of glory* as the earnest of their eternal inheritance ; they have on earth foretastes of the joys that will never end. It may well be

said, "Blessed are the people whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sins are covered:" Let what will come, blessed are the people who have returned unto the Lord their God. Let sore temptations come, they are armed; let tribulations overflow the land, they have their refuge; let death approach their door, it has no sting for them; let the day of judgment arrive, they are ready and safe in Christ. "Blessed indeed are the people that are in such a case, and whose God is the Lord," and blessed shall they be.

3. Does this blessing *belong to you*? Have you returned unto the Lord in truth? If not, it will profit you nothing to hear of the felicity of the saints. What benefit doth a man born blind derive in hearing the finest description of the starry heaven? All its beauties and grandeur are lost upon him. What doth it profit those that starve with hunger in an enemy's land to read of the feasts, luxuries and mirth of some distant country? And what will it avail you to hear of the felicity of the saints of God; of their blessed hope on earth, and their great and eternal inheritance in heaven, if you are not to share of their felicity, hope, and inheritance? Nay, it will *add* to your torment, to see those who return to God ascending up to the heaven of heavens, when you sink down into the bottomless pit. It must pain Dives the more in seeing Lazarus in Abraham's bosom. Judas's torments are increased in seeing the glory of Peter and the rest of the apostles. He had been under the same teacher, and enjoyed the same privileges, but perished by the abuse of them.—And what must become of you, who enjoy a day of

grace; hear the gospel of God; and have the same invitations, offers, and promises with those who do return to the Father, and yet harden your hearts through unbelief? "How shall you escape, if you neglect so great salvation."

4. How quiet and *unconcerned* do multitudes lie down in a state of sin and death! Tremendous state! Is it nothing to you to abide under the wrath of God? To lose the great salvation of Christ? And to ruin your souls, and sink into eternal torments?—In order to escape all this tremendous ruin and misery, nothing more is required than simply this—*Return in heart to God*; come home to your Father's house; receive Christ into thine heart, and lay hold on eternal life in him. Then will your heavenly Father fall on your neck and kiss you with the kisses of eternal love.—Earnestly pray the *Holy Spirit* to draw your hearts to God in Christ; to create you anew; to reconcile you to God; to bring you into the bonds of the covenant; and seal you unto the day of redemption.—Instead of this, should you still *sleep* on, mind earthly things, neglect the great salvation, and never return to God, awful and tremendous as the sentence is, it must be pronounced. You must be banished, accursed from God for ever. O then return, return. The door of mercy is now open, and kept open for you, while the day of grace lasts. There is yet room, room for you in the Saviour's kingdom, and in the bosom of his love. Believe this, and venture your ruined soul on the ocean of his grace. He will indeed receive you and fall on your neck and kiss you. Only come home, it is all he asks, and can

you deny this, and say, *I will not come?* Impossible ! It is thy God that calls ; it is thy Saviour that invites ; it is pardon, and peace, and endless life that he offers, offers freely, and offers all to you, ruined sinner. It must be impossible for you to refuse any longer. Then say now, ‘ Lord, I come to thee.’ Say so from thine heart in truth, and the Lord will hear and receive you. And the first step you take towards home, he will notice and run to meet you, and will embrace you with the arms of his everlasting love, will pardon you all transgressions, and will no more remember your sins, “ For his mercy endureth for ever.”

XI.—THE PENITENTIAL CONFESSION.

Ver. 21.—*And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.*

I. THE prodigal son returns to his father's house, in a very DIFFERENT STATE OF MIND from that in which he left it. He set off in very high spirits, full of self-conceit and pride ; but comes home with a broken heart, full of contrition, and deep self-denial. When he set off he had no thoughts of returning, but expected to enjoy every pleasure, and to have glorious times of it, when he had his own will and way. But he found it quite necessary to return : stern necessity compels him to come back. And he has a very poor

story to tell his father of his pilgrimage and adventures. Instead of having to boast of noble exploits, acquired laurels, and a paradise of pleasures; he has to tell him of keeping swine, and desiring to fill his belly with the husks which the swine did eat. We shall be very much mistaken if ever he leaves home again: he has had enough of wandering.

1. To see the apostate sinner returning home to his God, and falling down with a broken heart before the throne of grace, to confess his sins and cry for mercy, is one of the *most affecting and delightful sights* under heaven. There is a peculiar grandeur in this view, far excelling any thing that can be seen in all creation. The coronation of an earthly king may have more pomp and glare attending it; but not the overflowings of mercy, and triumphs of grace which attend the repentance of a sinner. We behold here a rebel returning into submission to his Prince, and a wild son into obedience to his Father. We see a sinner that has left God and destroyed himself, made truly sensible of his enormous wickedness and deepest danger. He comes back to his Father's door, loaded with guilt, filled with confusion, and trembling for fear of judgment. He falls down on his bended knees; weeps bitterly, and saith to his Father, "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." I have no defence to make, nor one plea to offer; nothing is left for me but to confess my transgressions; to bewail my folly and guilt; and to cry towards heaven for compassion and mercy. Against heaven have I sinned, and to heaven I cry for remission

of sins: "God be merciful to me a sinner." I must have free pardon or perish; for all I have is sin—*sin*, and nothing else.

2. The returning sinner is now *where he ought to be*—at the footstool of mercy, where alone he can find relief. He is confessing his sins before the throne of grace, and seeking for free pardon and salvation. Where else can the transgressor go for pity, but to the sin-pardoning God, who alone can take away sin? All things in creation are at enmity with the man that is at enmity with God. And all doors are shut against even the penitent, but the door of mercy and grace. Before that door we now find the sorrowful prodigal, confessing his sins before his injured Father, and imploring his pardon and blessing. He is in his proper place, in the very place where he ought to be, and where alone salvation can be found.

3. *Millions before him* have prostrated before this throne of grace, and obtained pardon of all sins, and peace with heaven. Those who are now triumphing before the throne of glory, have been formerly mourning and weeping before the throne of mercy and grace. All that are now *in the way* to glory, are constant visitors at the throne of grace: there they receive instructions for the way, and strength to travel on: there they have communion with God, to teach them what heaven is, and to give them a relish for it. To this throne of grace and mercy *we ourselves* must come. Praying penitents alone are pardoned: "He that asketh receiveth, he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." The prayerless soul

shall perish in his sins. All in the generations *yet to come* that shall be saved, will visit this throne of grace, and fall prostrate in penitence at the door of mercy. Wherever God designs salvation, he poureth down the spirit of prayer and supplication. Beggars alone shall inherit the kingdom, and grow rich towards God. *Then live in prayer.*

4. *None ever perished* before the throne of grace, who truly confessed their sins, and cried in faith for mercy. Multitudes have trembled exceedingly, and fainted; but none died. Many in bowing before the throne, wrote the bitterest things against their own souls, when God brought not one charge against them, but justified them freely from all things in Christ Jesus. Many weep bitterly over sins which they well remember; but which God has long ago blotted out of his book, and buried in everlasting oblivion. So then, many penitents tremble, weep, and faint at the door of mercy, but none perish there.

5. *The benefits and blessings* which true beggars at the throne of grace derive from heaven, are incalculable and of immense value. There the blind is made to see, the deaf to hear, and stammerers to speak plain: there the lepers are cleansed, the debtors released, and the prisoners set free: there the hungry souls are fed, the poor made rich, and the disconsolate mourner to rejoice and sing. When you approach the throne, He that sits on the throne saith unto you, "Ask what you will, and it shall be given you," if you ask in faith and in the name of Christ. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." We all must become

beggars, or perish in poverty and guilt. We must bow before the throne, and cry in the language and spirit of the penitent prodigal: "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

II. We here look at a TRUE PENITENT approaching mercy's door, confessing his sins, and praying for pardon. Let us mark in what *spirit* he comes; what he has to *plead*; and what he may *obtain* at the hand of his God and Father.

1. In what *spirit* and temper of heart must the sinner come before his God? He must come as a *true penitent*. No repentance—no mercy: the sincere penitent alone shall be pardoned. "He that confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall have mercy." He that is broken in heart, poor in spirit, and trembleth at God's word, shall draw nigh unto him, and have his wants supplied. "He healeth those that are broken in heart, and satisfieth the hungry with good things; but the rich he sends empty away, and the proud he will know afar off."—All true converts come to God in *faith*. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." "Let us then draw nigh unto him with a true heart, in full assurance of faith." Believe, without wavering, the whole testimony of God, respecting his Son Jesus.—They come in *truth*. Not in appearance and profession only, but in truth and sincerity. God is truth, and will regard nothing but truth, and hateth a lie. "Our loins therefore must be girt about with truth, for God requireth truth in the inward parts, and they that worship

God, must worship him in spirit and in truth, and the Father seeketh such to worship him."—They return to God in *humility*, and approach the most Holy with reverence and godly fear. High thoughts of themselves are now vanished; they come trembling before the Majesty of heaven. Abraham felt that he was but dust and ashes. Jacob said, "I am less than the least of all thy mercies." David cried, "Who am I, O Lord God, that thou shouldst do any thing for me." When Job looked upon God, he abhorred himself, and acknowledged that he was vile. Peter cried, "I am a sinful man, O Lord." And Paul said that he was the chief of sinners. And hear what this returning prodigal saith of himself, "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." All that come to God in truth, approach him with humility, reverence, and godly fear.—They come with an *earnest spirit*, that will plead with God and take no denial. Formerly they prayed as if they prayed not: hardly knew what they asked, and cared not whether their petitions were granted or denied. But now like the importunate widow, they will give God no rest: they lay hold on the angel of the covenant, and say, "I will not let thee go, till thou bless me." But *why* so very earnest? The soul is lost; salvation is at stake; and the Lord is coming to judgment. They are wrestling for a crown, a kingdom, and eternal glory. Who in such a case would not strive, and press into the kingdom? "From the days of John the Baptist till now, the kingdom of God suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."—This then

is the *spirit* in which true converts approach their God. They come with penitence, with faith, with truth, with humility, and great earnestness. So must we come, or be left to die.

2. What have they, who do return in a right spirit, to *plead* before the Lord, to induce him to pardon them? They cannot plead their *innocence*, for they are guilty and justly condemned. It would be vain to plead that they have sinned less than some others, when Adam ruined a world with one sin. "He that offendeth in one point is guilty of all." The wages of every sin is death, and there is no man that sinneth not; therefore by the deeds of the law shall no man living be justified." Were they to plead their *repentance* and reformation; this makes no more atonement than the sorrows of Judas, when he confessed, "I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." What then have penitents to plead when they appear before God?

Their grand plea is the *MEDIATION of the Son of God*. Every thing they find there, they have the divine warrant to plead in behalf of their ruined souls. They can plead all that Christ ever did or suffered; all his merits and his purchase; they can plead his offices of king, priest, and prophet; they can plead his death on earth, and his intercession in heaven.—They are authorized to say, *Whatever Christ prepared, he prepared for us*. He opened a fountain of life; he opened a way to God; he opened a door of hope and mercy; he made atonement for sin; he brought in an everlasting righteousness, and a finished salvation,—and all for us.

—They have also a warrant to say, *Wherever Christ is found*, he is there for us. Under the law, under the curse of the law, and under the power of death. If we view him in the agonies of Gethsemane; on the cross of Calvary; or on the throne of heaven; we are permitted to say, He is there for us.—This, then, is what penitent sinners have to plead, why God should have mercy on them. They can plead every thing they find *within* the mediation of the Son of God.—But they must plead then in *faith* without wavering, or they shall plead in vain; for God will hear no voice but the voice of faith in his Son, and in his truth and grace.

3. If true penitents before the throne of grace, plead the mediation of Christ in faith, what may they *expect to receive* from God? Rather what gift or blessing which God can bestow or man enjoy, but they may expect? “They have a promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. He giveth grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”—They may expect to obtain mercy, and find grace to help them in every time of need; to receive power to become the sons of God; and to have the Spirit of adoption in their hearts, crying Abba, Father; to be clothed with the garment of salvation, to drink of the water of life, and feed on the bread of heaven.—They may expect the wisdom that is from above, strength to overcome the world, and grace to triumph finally over sin, death, hell, and the grave.—When they come to God in Christ, they receive the love of God in their hearts, and hope full of a glorious immortality, as a sure earnest of the everlasting

kingdom : yea, " they are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."—Let them lay the *hand of faith* on the head of the atoning Saviour, and God will give them a life that knows no end ; a lamp that shall never be extinguished ; and treasures which never can be spent. God stands ready to give every thing to them that return to him in his Son Jesus. He gives them his covenant of peace ; he gives them the kingdom, and constitutes them heirs of all the promises.—Let every returning prodigal then believe without wavering that these things are true, and feel assured, that faith will always receive as much as it ever can ask of God. So runs the promise, " Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."—Who then would not pray without ceasing ? Who would not ask for great things, seeing that all which Christ could purchase with his precious blood stand ready for them ?—Sinner, look up to heaven and say to Jehovah Jesus, " Be thou my God."

III. " I have SINNED against heaven."

1. New converts are often in *deep distress*, though now in a pardoned state, and reconciled to their heavenly Father.—Though the Almighty has fully forgiven them all trespasses, yet they can never forgive themselves. Yea, though the Lord declare that their sins are all forgiven, and seal a sense of pardon on their consciences ; yet they still feel indignant at their past offences against the Lord God. The prophet told David on his repentance, " The Lord hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die." Yet David all his lifetime cried, " My sin is ever before me." It is reported

of Peter that he often wept when he heard the cock crowing, yet knew well that his sin was pardoned. And this prodigal had been kissed and embraced by his Father as a token of forgiveness, yet hear his deep groans and bitter lamentation, "I have sinned against heaven."

2. Evangelical repentance belongs to the *state of grace*, and not to the state of nature. It is the lamentation of a child, and not of a foreigner or an alien. It is the mourning language of those that are already brought into God's family. "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth," Jer. xxxi.—All true converts experience shame and sorrow on account of their past evil conduct; for they now see what a holy God they offended, what an infinite evil sin is, and what deep dangers it has plunged them into. Where lived the Christian who has not cried, "It is an evil and bitter thing to sin against God: Wo unto me that I have sinned:" my burden is intolerable.'

3. The distress which young converts feel is *unavoidable*. When brought into the light they see where they have been, sporting on the brink of the bottomless pit; saved in mercy from dropping in, and brought into a place of safety, by the God they sinned against. This kindles love and gratitude to their great deliverer, and produceth godly sorrow in their hearts, that they have ever rebelled against so good and gracious a God,

whose loving kindness they never can forget.—The unregenerate indeed may repent that they have sinned against a just and holy God, and tremble for fear of judgment. The children of grace alone are melted into sorrow by the loving kindness of the God of salvation.—All the converts of grace have some distress of soul; and that degree of distress is sufficient, which weans them from sin and drives them to Christ. Some have far deeper darkness and stronger fears than others, and for a longer time; but why this is, we cannot tell now, it is one of the things we shall know hereafter. Some of the reasons may be these: they have some right hand sin which they cannot part with; some idol which they refuse to give up; or some duties which they omit to perform aright. Or, it may be, they have clearer views of sin than of grace; of their deserving to die, than of Christ's power to save; and that they attend more to the works of their own corruptions, than to the operations of the Spirit in their hearts. Distressed children that walk uprightly often cleave to self-righteousness: they seek for something in themselves to trust to, instead of going out of themselves entirely, and lean upon Christ alone. Go and learn this lesson more perfectly.

4. The distresses of God's children for salvation are *beneficial*. They keep many from going to sleep; from trusting to themselves, and from neglecting the ordinances of grace. They keep them watching and praying; they keep them humbling, beggars at the throne of mercy; they keep them from going astray from God after the things of the flesh.—What numbers

in the way of Zion have *praised* God aloud for the dark nights they have passed through; for the severe conflicts they endured; for the bitter cups they were made to drink; and for the hedge of thorns which kept them in the way. We are greatly *instructed* by our troubles, distresses, and privations: what could we know of the value of light, if we never knew darkness? of the sweetness of rest, if we never experienced weariness? or of the blessedness of joy and peace, if we had never known distress?—Trials *quicken* the soul, and serve as the air to the fire; to make it burn the brighter. The loudest prayers that ever reached heaven were from some dark pits, the mire and the clay; from under heavy waves, and in deep waters. “Out of the *depths* have I cried unto thee O Lord,” Ps. cxxx. 1. “In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God,” Psalm xviii. 6. It will appear in the end that our miseries are some of our chief mercies: for our light afflictions which are but for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.—Yet we should be aware that sincere and pious souls may *indulge* their distresses to their injury; they may sink their own spirits too low for any holy exercise, or any enjoyment of the consolations of Christ.

IV. True converts view their sins, as of enormous MAGNITUDE.

1. I have sinned against *heaven*; all that heaven is; all that heaven contains; and all that heaven can bestow. Is it possible to exceed this in wickedness and guilt? What then must be my danger? and what can I now reasonably look for as my portion, but the heaviest

punishment that God can inflict; and the most tremendous judgments that heaven itself can pour down?—Hear the confession and bitter lamentation of a sinner, under a deep sense of his guilty conduct towards his God and Saviour.

‘ I have sinned against heaven; against the *God of heaven*; the highest, the best of all beings; the God of gods, and Lord of all lords; the most holy and the most mighty; he that made the worlds, and will judge them.—I have sinned against all the *laws* of God. His laws are holy, just, and good. It is the highest privilege of the holy angels in glory, to observe and obey these laws, and do the will of the Most High God. But I have broken his laws, in thought, word, and deed. I have broken them all, and that a thousand times over. How deep my guilt!—How heavy must be my punishment! I have sinned against the *government* of the Most High. He ruled in equity and kindness; and in all his management and appointments, consulted the benefits and happiness of all within his vast dominions. But without provocation I have proved a disobedient and rebellious subject; enlisted under the banner of his grand adversary, and fought against his sacred throne. What then will become of me? Where can a rebel against the Almighty God find a refuge? Who can defend if he destroys?—I have sinned against the *bounty*, gifts, benefits, mercies, and blessings of my God. These he showered down daily upon me, when I deserved not the least favour at his hand. But these I have grossly abused, and took occasion by them to sin the more, and made them to minister to

my lusts. Such has been my conduct from my youth up. What then must be the number of my transgressions, and the amount of my guilt?—I have sinned against the *Saviour* of the world. God, in his infinite love, sent his own eternal Son to suffer, bleed, and die for our redemption. The *Saviour* came into the world to save sinners: he offered his soul a sacrifice for sin, and made full atonement: wrought out a glorious salvation for us. This he offered freely to me; I rejected it a thousand times. And instead of receiving him for my *Saviour*, I crucified him afresh. What hell can be too hot for such a transgressor as I have been all my days until now!—I have sinned against the *Holy Ghost* times out of number. God sent his Spirit down from heaven to dwell in my heart, to create me anew, to unite me to Christ, to make me holy, and to be my comforter, my guide, my teacher, and my defence. This Holy Spirit stood long at my door, suing for admission; but I resisted him, grieved him, and caused him to depart.—What then can I expect God to do with a rebel, that has sinned against heaven as I have done? For I have sinned against Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, against law and gospel, against mercies and blessings, against all that God is, or heaven can give. Where, oh where, can a sinner like me flee from the wrath to come? Rocks and mountains fall and cover me from the wrath of God and the Lamb!’

2. If a man were only to sin against the *whole earth* and all that dwell on the earth, he would have something to fear. Were he to insult his sovereign, to abuse all in authority, to revile magistrates and ministers, and

to provoke to furious wrath all that breathe on the earth ; in such a case his situation would be forlorn, and his heart in constant tremor. He would be like *Cain*, expecting every creature he met with to slay him. Our own situation as sinners against heaven is *far more perilous* than this. We have provoked the Lord God omnipotent to wrath against us, and summoned all heaven to punish us to the uttermost. This the penitent prodigal very sensibly felt, when he cried with agony of soul, "I have sinned against heaven."

3. *Is salvation possible?* Can such transgressors ever be pardoned? When we look at the magnitude of their offences, and the evil of sin, we are ready to say, Impossible! What is so with man is not so with God. He has given us the most abundant proofs, that with him "all things are possible." In his infinite wisdom and boundless mercy, he has devised a plan and found out a way to annihilate sin, and save the sinner. And very marvellous is the way, by which God can be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly. "He has laid help upon one Almighty to save." The Son of God became the Son of man, that the children of wrath might be made the children of grace. "He was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." He endured the cross, and laid down his life for us, that we might obtain eternal life in him. All this was done for his very *enemies*, that had rebelled to the uttermost against him. "When we were yet enemies, Christ died for the ungodly," and wrought out a glorious, complete, and eternal salvation for them. Now a way to heaven is opened for these great trans-

gressors, "and whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but obtain everlasting life." Was there ever love like God's *redeeming love*! 'Oh, for this love let rocks and hills their lasting silence break.' Let heaven and earth adore him, let the whole creation praise him, for the fountain of life, for the rivers of his grace, and the ocean of his love. Let poor, perishing sinners bless and praise him in the loudest strain, for the new and living way to God, and for the hope of glory.—When such rich provisions are made by the God of grace, for the salvation of ruined sinners, let them not be guilty of the *highest offence* of all against God, that of *rejecting* the Saviour. We may well ask those that do this, "How shall ye escape, if ye neglect the great salvation?" Confess, with the prodigal, "I have sinned against heaven;" pray with the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

V. True penitents AGGRAVATE their transgressions.

1. "I have sinned *in thy sight*." He thought it not enough to say, "I have sinned against heaven;" but he must add, Lord, I have done it before thy face, whilst thou wert looking at me. We all know, that to *conceal* sin from the all-seeing eye of God is a thing impossible. All things at once are open to the view of him, with whom we have to do. Many in their folly try to hide their wickedness, and seek the cover of the night, that they may sin in secret. Darkness is no darkness with God. The darkness and the light to him are both alike: "The darkness hideth not from thee:" and what is done in secret, he will publish upon the house-top.

2. Sinners *profess to know* that God is every where ; yet they will venture upon sin in his presence, before his eyes, when they must know that God is looking at them :—this is a very *daring* spirit in man. You would think it very daring in any man, to wear the colours and arms of rebellion in the king's court and before his face : far more daring the spirit of that man that will act so in the presence of his God. What are your oaths, lies, filthy conversation, and all other sins, but arms of rebellion against the Most High ; and these you wear and wield in the presence of God, as if you bid him defiance.—To sin before the eyes of God, is the greatest *impudence* possible. To commit adultery in secret, is a damnable sin : to do this publicly, like Zimri, would be an intolerable impudence : Yet to be wicked before men, is as nothing to the impudence of the sinner, that will sin wilfully and without blushing, before the face of his God and Maker. Continuing in sin, betrays a great *hardness* of heart.—God often lays affliction on the loins of transgressors, binds them down to a bed of sickness, and separates them from their evil companions and means of open rebellion, to see if they will relent and turn from their evil ways. But no sooner are their bands loosed, and strength renewed, but they return with avidity and additional eagerness to their former evil practices of rebellion against God. These run the greatest hazard, though they know it not ; for “ He that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.” *Unbelief* is at the bottom of all this conduct. Sinners are often warned

of their danger ; exhorted to reform ; counselled to return unto the Lord ; and encouraged to look to the Saviour for mercy and grace :—all is lost on them ; they will hear no voice but that of their own sinful inclinations and evil propensities ; they go on frowardly in the way of their own hearts. And why is this ? They *believe nothing* of all that God saith unto them. While they continue under the dominion of unbelief, all warnings, counsels, and instructions are wholly lost on them : they will go forward and increase in impiety, till iniquity becomes their final ruin.

3. The *long-suffering patience* of the Holy Lord God is truly wonderful. What multitudes of the children of men delight in sin, and serve it ; hate holiness, and fight against God ; yet we see that the Lord beareth with them to admiration : though they rebel openly, insult him to his face, add sin to sin, and glory in their shame ; yet God spareth their lives, and continueth their mercies for many years. Well indeed may he be styled, “ The God of patience,” Rom. xv. 5. He waited a hundred and twenty years on wicked men in the days of Noah. He waiteth long on the worst of sinners in our day. They owe their lives to his forbearance and patience : “ I am the Lord, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed,” Mal. iii. 6. The whole race of men have cause to say, “ The Lord God is merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,” Exodus xxxiv. 6. *Why* does God lengthen out the lives of enemies and rebels ? “ The long-suffering of our Lord is salvation,” 2 Pet. iii. 15. He waiteth to be gracious, and is reluctant to

strike the sinner dead ; because “ he delighteth not in the death of a sinner : ” he is loath to give up the soul as a prey to Satan : and after he has waited for many years at his door in vain, he still crieth, “ How shall I give thee up ! ” O hardened and daring sinner, “ Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering ; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance ? ” Rom. ii. 4.

4. To keep in constant mind that we are always in the presence of God, would be of *vast advantage* to all descriptions of men ; both to the good and to the evil.

It would be of great benefit to the *wicked*, to remember that the eyes of the Lord are upon them every where. “ They forget God ; he is not in all their thoughts : ” “ They think not on his name : ” they sin boldly and without fear, and say, “ Tush, how doth God know ? ” But “ he knows the secrets of your hearts, and will set your secret sins in the light of his countenance.” He keeps a correct register of all your transgressions, and will bring every work to judgment. Try then to *impress* your mind with a constant recollection, that God is always present, with his eyes upon you : you sin in his sight. Read often, and with attention, Psalms liii. lxxiii. and cxxxix.

It would be of great benefit to *superficial Christians*, to recollect that God always looks at them, and marks all they do. You are satisfied with the form of religion, and decent appearance ; but God looks at the heart, and trieth the reins of the children of men. He care-

fully examines your principles, purposes, ends, and motives. Nothing but truth will go down with God. What has not truth in it, though it glitters like gold, is of no value in his sight. The Pharisees were admired of men, when nothing better in the esteem of Christ than whited sepulchres, and a generation of vipers. Examine your heart-religion, for God will ; and truth alone shall stand.

It would be of the greatest benefit to *true Christians* always to recollect that God is present with them : “ He is not a God afar off, but a God that is near.” “ In him we live, and move, and have our being.” Whereever we are, we may say with Hagar, “ Thou God seest me.” Thou searchest and knowest my thoughts and my heart, and art acquainted with all my ways.—See Ps. cxxxix. throughout.—Then let us set the Lord always before us, and say continually, Thou, Lord, art with me, and thine eyes are upon me. This above all things will deter us from sin, and keep us watching and praying : it will put life in our prayers, and fervour in our devotion : it will arm us against temptations, and support us in the day of trouble. What is the *consolation* of the Christian believer in all his difficulties, conflicts, and tribulation, but this, “ Thou, Lord, art with me, a present help in trouble.” All may leave us ; but God never will. “ This God is our God for ever and ever, and he will be our guide, even unto death ; ” then what have we to fear ?

VI. “ I am not worthy to be called thy son.” Here we behold the sweet HUMILITY of a subject of grace. His proud spirit is subdued, he has the lowest thoughts

of himself, he lies prostrate at his father's feet, and saith, "O my father, I deserve not to be called thy son."

1. Man by nature is a very *proud* being, because he has lost the knowledge of God, and caused his Spirit to depart from him. He thinks far more highly of himself than he ought to think. In the pride of his heart he seeks to be *independent* of his Maker; rejects the salvation which God hath provided for sinners; resists the Spirit of God; casts away his government; and will do his own will, against the will of his Maker. Here is the pride of life; which renders man detestable in the sight of the Most Holy, "who will know the proud afar off." This pride must be *destroyed* in man, or man will be destroyed in his pride. The higher man is in his own esteem, the more despicable is he in the sight of God. He must either come down in humility, or come down in ruin. "He that exalteth himself, shall be abased." "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day," Isa. ii. 11. If Herod will receive the adoration due to God alone, the filthy vermin shall devour him on his throne: the Lord saith, "My glory will I not give to another."

2. We *must have humility of heart*, or never know happiness. Without this holy temper of mind we cannot draw nigh to God, nor ascend into heaven. We may be saved without riches, or learning, or any earthly felicity; but no man can be saved without godly humility: it is his meetness for heaven. Poor afflicted Lazarus ascended to Abraham's bosom; while

Dives sunk into hell. In what way does humility discover itself; or, wherein does it chiefly consist? It mainly consists in feeling our entire *dependance* on God for life and happiness: in ascribing to him *the glory* of all we do aright, and all the felicity we enjoy: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give the praise:" in feeling ourselves *unworthy* of the least favour at God's hand, and to consider all as his free gifts: "I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof;" "Not worthy to be called thy son;" "I am less than the least of all thy mercies." It greatly consists in meek *submission* to the will of God under adverse providence and heavy sufferings: "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it."—In *contentedness* in a low station, and true gratitude for the bare necessities of life: "I have learnt, that in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." Humility discovers itself, in our being willing to be *counted the least* and the last, "and esteeming others better than ourselves:" in meekly bearing *insults*, and shewing all readiness to forgive injuries. "When Jesus was reviled, he reviled not again;" and when they crucified him, he prayed, "Father, forgive them." "He has left us an example, that we should follow his steps." He crieth to us, "Come and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart."

3. What will *produce* this humility in the heart of man? Not earthly pleasures and smiling Providence. Who can say that worldly prosperity brought him nearer to God? "Not many great and mighty are

called."—Neither will *adversity* of itself humble the heart of man. Many have been reduced from affluence to poverty; from honour to disgrace, and from health to sickness, and yet continued proud and haughty as ever. Many are destitute of all humility that have nothing to support their pride: they have neither wealth nor learning, nor parentage nor virtue, yet can be as proud and lofty in heart as any that possess all these. Pride is odious in all, but detestable in the poor. Humility, on the contrary, is ornamental in all; but most grateful and attractive in those that have most to support their pride. Who does not admire the sweet humility of the governor of Egypt, when he falls on the necks of his offending brethren, and dries up their tears? And who is not offended and disgusted at the proud prayer of the Pharisee in the temple, and his walking to the uppermost seat, when he had neither grace nor virtue, to give him any claim to this distinction?

4. *Self-knowledge* alone will humble the heart of a sinner. The Spirit of God only can give us this knowledge effectually. When he comes to guide the sinner home, he opens his eyes, and gives him to see that he is but dust and ashes; and so vile that nothing can make him clean but the blood of Christ: he shews him what a great offender he is against heaven; how justly he deserves destruction, and that nothing but the interposition of divine mercy and grace can deliver him from going down to the pit. This view will *hide pride* from man, and give him such low thoughts of himself, as will break his hard heart, and humble his proud

spirit, and make him confess to God, "I am not worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants."—But we can never truly know ourselves without first knowing *Christ*. It is in his light that we shall see light: it is when we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ that we come to discover effectually our own deformity, guilt, and wretchedness. It is the atonement that shews the evil of sin; and the greatness of God's grace in salvation discovers to us how low we are fallen, and how helpless we are in ourselves. Nothing breaks the hard heart, or humbles the proud spirit of man, like the believing views of the Son of God dying for us on the cross of Calvary.

5. The humble and meek are the only *blessed* people in the world. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the kingdom of heaven." But who hath ever heard of the blessing of the proud? and who so proud as those that reject Christ and neglect his great salvation? They are not in a state of mind to enjoy any spiritual blessings; but "the Lord giveth grace to the humble." God hath a peculiar *regard* for the meek and lowly in heart. "The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way; and the meek shall inherit the earth."—"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God."—Yea, "Be clothed with humility." The way to glory is to go down in humility: "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." The lowest in their own esteem are the highest in the favour of God; and as they are his peculiar delight, he will always abide with them: "For thus saith the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, whose

name is Holy ; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones," Isa. lvii. 15. The prodigal now returns to his Father with this *blessed temper* of mind. Under a due sense of his deep guilt, and with a broken and contrite heart, he throws himself down at his Father's feet and saith unto him, 'After my great transgressions against heaven and before thee, O my Father, I am no more worthy to be called thy son.'

XII.—THE BEST ROBE.

Ver. 22.—"*But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him ; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.*"

I. When a sinner truly repents, and returns unto the Lord his God, NO MENTION is made of his past offences.

1. When such a *wicked son* appears again before his father's door, we might reasonably expect to hear the deeply grieved and much injured father addressing his rebellious son thus : 'Ah wretched youth ! how dare you appear again before my door ? what are those filthy rags that you have got on ? and what has become of

all the treasures you received of me? Have you not spent them in riots and revellings, and with your harlots? Go, return to them again, and see my face no more.'—Lo! none of this. The father's heart is full; it melts with pity; it overflows with compassion: the very sight of his son's misery penetrates his heart; the bowels of a father yearn over his suffering son. That son is now at his feet confessing his transgressions, and imploring his pardon. The father abruptly prevents him, and calls in haste for the best robe to cover him; he also adorns him with ornaments; makes him a rich feast, and rejoices over him with joy and singing.

2. God *never mentions* past offences to true penitents. Wherever they have wandered, and whatever they have been doing, not a word is said to them about things that are past: if they come home, the Father forgives them all they have done against heaven and before him. In the very day they return home in penitence and throw themselves on his mercy, they obtain mercy: in the very moment the hand of faith lays hold on Christ, a veil of universal forgiveness is drawn over all their past sins and iniquities. "God justifieth them freely from all things."—Saul of Tarsus had sinned grievously before conversion against the Lord Christ, but when he submitted himself to the grace of Christ, not one word is said to him about his former blasphemy and persecution: nor is any thing said to Zaccheus about his past covetousness: nor to Mary about her former lewdness: nor to any other sinner that turns from sin to God. The Lord says of every sincere penitent in the world, "All his trans-

gressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him," Ezekial xviii. 22.

But *what is become* of all their past transgressions? No mention whatever is made of them in the day of their conversion to the Lord, no more than if they never had sinned; God says not a word about them. What is become of the multitude of their former sins? They are all *forgiven*.—Well, then, may pardoned sinners cry with rapturous joy, "Who is a God like unto thee that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy," Micah vii. 18. Though their sins are pardoned, yet they are always before the face of the Lord.—No; "He casteth them behind his back." But they are still some where near us.—No; "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." Still they are to be found somewhere on earth.—No; "He hath cast all their sins into the depth of the sea." But does not the Lord keep them ever upon record?—No; "He hath blotted them out of his book." But for all this, the Lord surely will keep their sins in remembrance.—No; "For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more," Jer. xxxi. 34. Say what you will, their sins must be somewhere in existence.—No; they are annihilated, and are no where to be found: "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found," Jer. l. 20. So clear and complete is their forgiveness in the day of penitence, and conversion unto the Lord,

that all their sins are freely pardoned ; blotted out ; buried in oblivion ; and are no where to be found.

3. We think far too little of the *act* of God in pardoning sin. Even those who reap the immense benefit of this act of grace, greatly undervalue it.—It is an act where God discovers more of his *almighty power*, than in any of all his works. In pardoning sin, all the divine attributes are concentrated and glorified together. Where do the *rivers of grace* flow so abundantly as in washing away sin ? Pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin, is an act of such infinite mercy and grace, that it gains unto the Lord an everlasting name, even the God of salvation. It is an act of the greatest *benefit* possible to the sinner : without it, all other gifts would be useless ; but the pardoned sinner is entitled to all blessings : “ All things are your’s,” when you are in Christ, and in a pardoned state.—It is an act which will *never be forgotten*, but had in everlasting remembrance by all the countless miriads that shall surround the throne of the Lamb. They appear there arrayed in *white*, and can never forget that they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb ; and they will never cease to sing, “ Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive honour, and glory, and blessing for ever and ever ; for he was slain for us.” In this song may *my soul* for ever join. Should any laugh at this enthusiasm, let them laugh now, I shall laugh also when I ascend into the heavens, within full view of the throne of God and the Lamb, and share of the joys of heaven, and the triumphs of eternity. For this hope, I am willing to bear the re-

proach of Christ, and revilings from a blind world, of which I have had my fair share for half a century. It has done me no injury. The reproach of the cross of Christ is a far greater honour than earthly crowns, and kingdoms can confer. So thought Moses;—

“If on my face for thy dear name
Shame and reproaches be;
All hail reproach, and welcome shame,
If thou remember me.”

II. The Father ordered his SERVANTS to clothe, adorn, and feed his starving son. God does all his works, and sends all his gifts, by some messengers and means that he useth: he makes one creature to serve another. His servants shall provide for his children.

1. The *children of men* are the objects of God's care and kindness; he makes all things through the vast creation to serve their interest, and promote their welfare.—He made the *earth* to be their dwelling-place, the house of their pilgrimage, and furnished this house with all manner of store to supply their wants during their journey home. As the earth is the habitation of the children of the men, the Lord makes *all creation* serve and supply the earth for their sakes. There is not an element but contributes largely towards enriching the earth, and supplying it with produce and fruitfulness for the use and benefit of mankind. The *sun* from the heavens sends down light and heat to illuminate and warm the earth to make it fruitful. The moon and the stars by night preserve it from total dark-

ness. The *air* is placed round about the whole earth, and breathes upon every part ; yea, upon every plant. Not a blade of grass but derives its life and growth from the air, which is the life of all creation. The *sea* also serves the earth ; sends its waters through the medium of the air and the sun-beams into the skies, in order to descend in showers to water the earth and make it fruitful.—So then all things in the material creation serve the earth, that the earth may serve man, and that man may serve God.

2. The Lord employs *some servants* to convey his gifts and blessings to his children. If he sends his holy law to his beloved Israel, it shall be by the hands of Moses and Aaron. If he sends his gospel to the nations of the earth, he will employ his apostles and messengers to carry it to them. If Christian churches are to be formed, he will send his servants to build them. The Almighty Saviour has a great and glorious work yet *to be* done on the earth : to destroy all Antichrists ; to convert all the nations upon earth ; to illuminate a dark world ; to give life to a dead world ; to extend the kingdom of grace over the whole earth ; and to subdue all things to himself. These are such things as man can never accomplish, and yet man must do them all. God will employ his servants to do these things : he will do nothing without them ; but will do all things by them. It is vanity to say that he can do his work without us, when it is his purpose and economy to do all his works in grace by us. Is there one soul saved, but some means and instruments are employed in his conversion ? God our Saviour sends

us to do what we *cannot* do, "For without him we can do nothing;" yet we must do it because he commands it, and by the power of Christ strengthening us, we can do all things.

3. The Lord confers *honour* upon man by using him as his instrument to carry on any of his works, even the least things that he is doing on the earth. It is a great honour to be the servant of God any where, or in any work: and men in the lowest station and in the meanest employ, may be the servants of the Lord Christ, and do the will of God from the heart, Ephes. vi. 6. The Lord of all has the undoubted right to *appoint* every man his work and station. If he puts us in the lowest place and at the meanest work, we have no ground for complaint, and God is not mistaken in his appointments. Even in the lowest station, we are not deprived of the highest honour; which is, to serve the Lord Christ.—The greatest thing that Paul could say of himself was, "I am the servant of Christ," the Christian believer that works in the coal mines, can say also, 'I serve the Saviour of the world.' There are *different degrees* of honour in the service of the same heavenly Master, and they who serve him most faithfully are the more advanced. We all *covet* the highest employment, and the most honourable services: but our reward will be not according to the nature of the work given us to do, but according to the manner we have done it. If the believer that works in the coal mines is stronger in faith, and deeper in humility, than he that is an ambassador for Christ to proclaim the gospel, he shall at last shine brighter in glory, Ephes. vi. 8. Let every one of

us keep in mind that we are instruments in God's hand to carry on his work by us. We are employed somewhere by him; let us take heed how we serve such a Master.

4. We should learn to set a *proper value* on all the messengers by whom the Lord sends his gifts and blessings unto us. We are all apt to exalt them too high, or sink them too low : some *despise* the message which God sends, because he sends it by frail men like themselves. And yet if God was to deliver his message by his own mouth, they could not endure it, and would soon cry with Israel of old, who said unto Moses in their fright, " Speak thou with us, and we will hear ; but let not God speak with us, lest we die," Exod. xx. 19. When the three disciples heard the voice of God himself on mount Tabor, they were struck to the ground with terror. So it is in mercy to our weakness that Jehovah sends his messages, gifts, and blessings by the hands of servants with whom we can converse. Who can dispute God's right to choose his messengers ? He will send by whom he will send. Let us take heed that we despise not the gifts, nor reject the messages, which come from heaven, because of the meanness of the messenger. Elijah did not despise the meat which the Lord sent him by a raven ; and the king of Israel rejected not the tidings brought to him by vile lepers. And we must not undervalue the treasures of grace because they are conveyed to us in earthen vessels.

The ministers and servants of Christ may be raised *too high*. We may think of them more highly than we ought to think : some look more to the servants than

to the Divine Master. When they derive benefit and blessing from their ministry, they forget that these are the gifts of the Father. It is not the servants, but the Father that provides the robe, the ring, the feast: the servants only bring them to the children. The messengers of Christ who give full proof of their divine mission, ought to be highly esteemed for their work's sake, and for their Master's sake; "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine," 1 Tim. v. 17. Yet "call no man master upon earth." "All things are of God," and his servants only convey to us his blessings. They only bring forth the best robe, and put it on his child.—So then, God does all his works, and communicates his blessings, by some instruments he employs: to be those instruments is an high honour.

III. "Bring forth the BEST ROBE, and put it on him."

1. Here the *love* of the Father, concealed till now, breaks forth in torrents without restraint, to the view of all around.—How must the *son feel* when he hears his Father addressing his servants, and saying unto them, Go and bring hither the best robe; not a robe, or something that you can find to clothe him; but bring the best robe in existence—the very best, and put it on him, and he shall wear it for my sake. What has the son *done* to call forth such strong affections and delight in the Father's heart? He came home, and that is all. The sinner returned unto the Lord his God; and that was all the eternal Father required. Let sinners only do

this, and they may have all things of God, for his affections will now flow for ever towards them. He pitied and took compassion on them when they wandered; but when they return he delights in them, and will take care of them.

2. When the servants *received this commission*, did they say, Where in all the earth can we find such a robe? let us go into the courts and palaces of kings and seek for it there.—No; says the Father, that will not answer the purpose,—none there good enough. You must bring one down from heaven, and the best that can be found there—the very same robe as the saints wear round about the throne. The robe of righteousness: the righteousness which is of God by faith; the righteousness of Christ, which is called the righteousness of saints. Bring forth the garments of salvation, and clothe him with true holiness, humility, and truth. Bring hither the white garments made of fine linen, clean and white, made white in the blood of the Lamb; and put it on him.—Clothe him with a garment wrought of gold, not the gold of Ophir, but of Paradise: that gold of which the crown of the saints in glory is composed, which is incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away. And he shall be made all glorious within.—In one word, let my returning son “put on Christ.” For this robe must mean, the whole salvation of Jesus; all that the sinner wants: all that Christ has purchased for him.

3. But *why* the best robe for such a son? Any filthy rags are quite good enough for him; let him wear such as he brought home with him; it cannot be said

that he deserves any better clothing. Very true, says the Father, he deserves no better : but as he came home, I deal not with him according to his merits, but according to mercy ; he therefore shall have the best robe.—None other would answer the *love* I bear to him : my own love is the principle of my actions, and my pleasure the rule of my conduct ; and it is my pleasure, that this my son shall wear the best robe that can be found within my dominions,—bring it forth and put it on him.—Besides, it must be the best robe, because of the *dignity* of his new relations and connections, and the company that he is now to move in. He is a king's son, of the blood royal of heaven : he is born of God, and made partaker of the divine nature : adopted into God's family and made an heir of all things. And as he is now to associate with those that are kings and priests unto God, and move in the highest circle, it is expedient that he should be arrayed in the finest robes and adorned with glorious apparel. Bring forth, I say, the very best robe, and put it on him.—And there is yet farther reason for it : the man is soon to be *translated* into the pure regions of the heaven of heavens, where all is “holiness unto the Lord.” None are admitted into that pure element, to blend with all the company of heaven, till they are beautified with salvation. None can share the inheritance of the saints in light, and reign with Christ on his throne, till they are made meet for so high a station. As the returning sinner is to stand for ever in the presence of God the Father, and to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth ; as he is destined to serve as a priest in the heavenly

temple, he must be arrayed in a suitable manner for that high station. Bring forth therefore the best robe and put it on him.—In addition to this: he is now clothed for *eternity*. No garment, but the garment of salvation will endure for ever; this will always last unimpaired. Jesus saith, “My righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and my salvation shall be for ever.” This is the best robe, bring it forth and put it on him.

4. “Put it on him.” We must ~~wear~~ this robe: it is not a thing to speculate upon, but a garment to put on. We ourselves must put off the old man with his deeds, “and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness,” Ephes. iv. 24. We must have both righteousness and holiness. “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?” 1 Cor. vi. 9.—“And that without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” We must appear before God in perfect beauty: “renewed in the spirit of our minds:” “clothed with the sun;” and “full of the Holy Ghost.” Let every one that hopes to appear before God in Zion, put on the best robe.—Without the wedding garment no soul shall be admitted into the glory of heaven. Oh then, if your eternal salvation depends upon this point, see to it, that you *put on* the robe.

IV. “And put a RING on his hand.” This ring is to be both for *safety* and for *ornament*.

1. FOR SAFETY. The Lord binds all his people to himself at the time that he clothes them with the garments of salvation.—This act of Christ, in securing his

people, is as needful as any other act of grace. For man in his best state is but vanity, frailty, and a lie.—When he is brought into a state of salvation, he brings the whole body of sin with him; and while sin dwelleth in him, he is prone to wander from God his Saviour, and bent upon backsliding. “The heart is still deceitful above all things and deperately wicked.” It needs the strongest bands to keep it from wandering and rebelling.—The Lord mercifully binds it fast to himself, in bands of everlasting union; with the cords of his love and grace; with a covenant ordered in all things and sure; and seals this covenant with his own ring, that it may stand fast for ever. And this ring he puts on the hand of every child of grace, to bind his heart to stand to the covenant; and to cleave stedfastly unto God. This ring may fairly be considered as the binding act of the covenant of salvation, where God engageth to be the Christian’s God, and where the believer engageth to take him for his God and portion for ever.

Jesus binds his people to himself by the *operations of his Holy Spirit* in their hearts. “By the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”—The Spirit gives to every one that returns home, a new heart and a right spirit; a heart to love God, and hate iniquity; to die to sin, and live unto righteousness; and all things become new.—These works and fruits of the Spirit in the soul are considered by Christian believers, as the seal of God on their hearts, and the earnest of heaven. “After that ye believed in Christ ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance,” Ephes. i. 13.

So, this ring, this seal, this earnest is given to *all believers*. If we have the robe, we have the ring. If Christ is made of God unto us righteousness, the Holy Ghost is become our new creator, sanctifier, and comforter.—Have *we ourselves* all this security for our salvation? Have we such strong bands to bind our hearts unto the Lord? then we may well throw out this challenge, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Who shall lay any thing to our charge, if God justifieth us freely from all things? And who can kill where Christ gives life eternal?”

We have *numberless bands* to tie our wandering hearts to God. All that Christ hath purchased: all that God hath promised: all the gifts and blessings which we have already received: and all the hopes and prospects of glory to come, are so many bands to bind our hearts to Christ:—And also our own eternal *interest*, our vows, and promises, and resolutions are additional bands to tie us down to the obedience of Christ. And all little enough to keep us steadfast in his covenant.

“Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
 Prone to leave the God I love;
 Here’s my heart, O take and seal it,
 Seal it for thy courts above.”

2. The ring is for ORNAMENT as well as for security. When we come to understand what God intends his church and people for, we naturally expect him to adorn them with the highest ornaments possible.—“Is

Christ coming to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe? Will he raise them up at the last day to a glorious immortality? Will he give them to sit with him on his throne, to be the companions of his joy and triumphs in glory eternal? Are they to be his habitation through the Spirit, and his temples to dwell in for ever?—Seeing they are destined for such glorious purposes, they must be made *suitable* for their high station. Jesus will clothe his bride with holiness; “deck her with ornaments: adorn her with jewels: beautify her with salvation; and will finally make her a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle.” He will change her into his own image, to go on from glory to glory. He will set his own beauty upon his church; and “Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us,” Psalm xc. 17.—There will be the most *transcendent* glory on the church of God, when the Holy Ghost shall have finished his work in her. None will shine brighter in glory eternal, but the King of Sion himself.—These ornaments, beauty and glory of the church of Christ will never *fade* away. The beauty of all creation shall vanish and be no more seen, and all the luminaries of heaven shall sink into darkness; but the beauty and glory of the saints shall shine with the utmost brilliancy through an eternal day.—Jesus in looking at the ornaments and comeliness of his church, takes the highest pleasure and *delight* in her; “The King greatly desires thy beauty,” and saith, “O thou fairest among women; thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee. As the lily among thorns, so is my

love among the daughters. Thou art all beautiful, O my love, thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes," Song of Solomon.—*Every* sinner that comes home to the Father receives this ring on his hand for ornament and security. Let thine heart say, may I wear it for ever.

V. "And put SHOES on his feet."—He must now walk in a *new way* which he never knew before. The Father will "lead him in paths which he has not known."—He must be furnished with proper *shoes* for this new way: "His feet must be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace," Ephes. vi. 15.

1. From the day of regeneration to the day of death, the life and conversation of the regenerate must be *very different* from what they were, while they lived without God in the world.—It must be so, for they now have undergone the greatest and most essential *change* that any creature can ever experience this side eternity. It is not merely a change of apparel, of language, of customs, or any outward appearance; but a change of heart, of life, of state, and of all things.—"Behold all things are become new." In the new birth they undergo the most *important* and extraordinary change that possibly can take place in this world. They are born of God, and made partakers of the divine nature, and so become the children of grace and of the resurrection. They are created anew in Christ Jesus, and translated from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son. They pass from death unto life, the best, the highest life of all. "I

give them eternal life, and they shall never perish."—"Because I live, they shall live also, saith the Saviour."

2. As they undergo such a marvellous change, they must necessarily *walk in a new way*; the way of holiness and righteousness; the living way which Jesus opened for them to the Father; the way of life and salvation. If to heaven you go, you must travel in the way that leads there. The children of grace must lead a *new life*, following the commandments of God, "and true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." "They must no longer live the rest of their time in the flesh, to the lusts of men; but to the will of God," 1 Peter iv. 2. "We must walk in newness of life."—They who are alive to God are dead to sin. "And how shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" "Our old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin."—The servants of God must not, and cannot be, the servants of sin; "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. When ye were the servants of sin, ye were without righteousness; but now, being made free from sin, and become servants unto God, ye have your fruit unto holiness; and the end everlasting life. Study the whole of Romans vi. So then, they that are risen with Christ, must, like Enoch, walk with God. New creatures in Christ

Jesus must walk in the new way : the way of holiness, the way of life eternal.

3. In order to walk in this way, they must put on the *gospel shoes*. They must be furnished out of the gospel with all needful qualifications to run the heavenly road. Let the gospel of God be truly believed, and it will furnish them with all they want for their journey : let the heart believe the testimony of God concerning his dear Son, and that heart will be enlightened to *behold* the glory of God in the person of Christ, and will be convinced that Christ is a Saviour indeed, and that there is salvation in no other.—When the glory of the Saviour and the grace and greatness of his salvation are brought within the view of believing souls, they will *go after Christ*, and cannot do otherwise; for the love of Christ constraineth them. His beauty and worth allure and overcome their hearts. The glorious gospel of the blessed God *furnisheth* all true believers with every thing they have need for, to travel on in the way everlasting, till they arrive at home in the land of uprightness : it furnisheth them with directions, with strength, and with comfort : it furnisheth them with a view of the eternal hills ; with the hope of glory ; and with such bright prospects that eclipse all things here below. These believing views, and foretaste of heaven, *enable* the men of grace to break every band, and to run in the heavenly road, to keep in the right way till they finally arrive at home, and enter into Zion “with everlasting joy on their head.” Then let all Christians put on and wear the gospel shoes, and run in God’s ways of holiness to heaven.

†
XIII.—THE RICHEST FEAST.

Ver. 23.—*And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it ;
and let us eat and be merry.*

THE father had clothed his returning son as soon as he appeared at his door. He will now feed him and provide the richest feast for his entertainment. He gives orders to kill the fatted calf, as was customary among the Jews on some great occasions. The father's joy is so overwhelming, that he will spare no expense to welcome his returning son. A great feast is made, "and they began to be merry."

I. This feast is the GREAT SALVATION by Christ crucified. In this are found all the provisions which the Eternal Father could prepare for the children of his grace, to feed and live upon, through time and for ever.—The *soul* must have its food, as well as the body, and cannot live without it. God has provided enough for all his family, and they shall never know a famine. "In our Father's house is bread enough and to spare." Very marvellous must this feast be, seeing that it is to supply myriads, countless as the sand of the sea, and to last through an endless eternity. May we be the happy guests at this bountiful table.—Let us inquire *what kind* of a feast this great salvation is: and what are the provisions it contains.

1. It is a *royal feast*. Not made by a common person, but by a King; yea, by the King of kings, the

great and eternal Jehovah himself. And as far as we know, this salvation is the greatest work of the Almighty, the richest feast that he ever did or ever will provide.—It is a feast made for the *King's Son*, his beloved and eternal Son, “who was set up from everlasting, and was in the bosom of the Father before the worlds were made.” And seeing that this feast is made to express the Father's love to his Son, and to be a standing memorial of that love, he would on such an occasion spare no expense.—More yet, it is a *marriage* feast for his Son. As it is made for the *King's Son*, it is also made on the greatest occasion; when Christ covenants to be the Saviour of the universal church: the Father commits it to the care of his Son, to be redeemed, saved, and glorified by him. The Son receives those that are committed unto him, and saith to the Father, “Thine they were, and thou gavest them me, and I will give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand; and I will raise them up at the last day.”—As this is God's own feast, made for his Son, and on the greatest occasion, it must necessarily be a most extraordinary feast.

2. According to what *rule* does God provide for this feast?—He provides according to his *riches in glory*: yes, according to the unsearchable riches of his grace. If this be the rule by which he acts in salvation, what must be the provisions he makes for his church and people?—He provides for them according to the *love* he bears to his beloved Son. This love has no bounds, therefore there are no bounds to the treasures provided

for those that dwell in Christ.—God provides for his church according to the *merits* of the great Redeemer. Whatever he merited by his life and death, shall be given to them that believe in his name. All the mercies and blessings, all the grace and glory that Christ could purchase with his blood, are treasured up for them in the great salvation. Nothing that God can bestow for the sake of his Son shall ever be denied to those who come home to the Father. Then, “great must be their portion and inheritance in heaven.”—God provides for the children of his grace, according to the *love he bears to them in Christ*. What that love is, Jesus informs us, where he saith, “Father, thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me.” If this be the rule by which God provides for his children, what must those provisions be!

3. There must be *very extraordinary provisions* made; for God provides for a *company* that no man can number, consisting of “ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.” The wants of such innumerable hosts of helpless beings through an endless eternity, will require very great supply. They will find sufficient provisions for them in the salvation of Christ. Let their number and their wants be what they may, here is enough for them all, and enough for ever. And they all can take but little to what they *leave* behind in the unsearchable riches of Christ, and in the love of God to man for his Son’s sake. Here all fullness dwells. Then what provisions can ever equal these, which God hath laid up for his own family?—If the ultimate end which Jehovah had in view in re-

demption, was his *own glory*, and to make himself known to men and angels, what treasures of mercy, grace, and love, would he not lay out for us in his great salvation, in order to manifest unto us what an infinite God he is !

4. Yet, marvellous to relate, sinners in general *neglect* this great salvation, and choose rather to perish for ever, than to come to the feast which God hath prepared. They can hear all about the salvation of God with cool *indifference* and unconcern. Though nothing else can deliver them from endless misery, yet they will take no pains to secure it. Nay, so far are the generality of sinners from seeking, that they stubbornly reject salvation, when offered unto them as the gift of God. Yea so determined are most men to close their hearts against Christ, that they will forfeit the favour of God, and abide under his wrath, rather than embrace his offered salvation. Lord, what is man ! Here are *two things* that will astonish all worlds through eternity, namely, That God would ever provide such a great salvation for such great enemies ; and that these enemies should reject it, when nothing else can save them from endless woe.—Christ *must see* of the travail of his soul. If some refuse, “ some must enter ; ” and they that do, shall find in this feast all the rivers of mercies that can flow from the love of God, and all the blessings that the blood of Christ could purchase. Yes, in the salvation of God they shall find every thing that can confer happiness on human beings, and carry on the joys and triumphs of eternity.

II. The children of grace FEED AND LIVE ON the

provisions which their heavenly Father has treasured up for them in the fulness of Christ. When others perish with hunger, they shall have enough. They partake of this great feast and live for ever. Their manner of feeding is by *looking* at Christ through faith, and every believing view they take of him nourisheth their souls. They have very numerous views to take of the Lord the Saviour, but can take no one view but affords food and refreshment to their faith and hope. —Some of the numberless and various views of Christ which afford nourishment to the souls of believers are these ;

1. Believers feed on the *glory of the person of Christ*, when they gaze upon it with great delight. “ They behold his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” This view will never cease to enliven and delight the believing sons of God. The more steadfastly he is looked upon, the more glorious and lovely does he appear to their view. In gazing on the beauty and glory of Immanuel, the children of his grace have often cried in rapturous delight ; “ He is fairer than the children of men, the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely.” — Yes, *believing views* of the glory of the person of Jesus has afforded many a delicious feast to millions of weary pilgrims, in their way to Canaan. And when they arrive at home, viewing the unveiled glory of the God-Man will yield an eternal feast to the whole universal church in heaven. The myriads of his redeemed will gaze, unwearied, on his loveliness through all eternity.

2. Believers feed also on the *mediation* of Christ

Jesus. This yields to the church the richest feast. The mediation of Jesus is of vast extent, filling the immense distance between the holy God and sinful men. Every thing that exists within the wide extent of the mediation of our High Priest is spiritual food and nourishment unto believers. They feed their minds on all the glorious *offices* he sustains as Mediator between God and us, such as King in Sion, High Priest over the house of God, and Prophet of his universal church. They feed on his *qualifications* to fulfil these offices, on his power, faithfulness and grace, and view him as God all-sufficient, and one almighty to save. They feed on his eternal love, on the riches of his grace, on his wisdom to direct, and power to save, on his all-sufficient merits, and on his covenant engagement to be with us always, even unto the end. Every believing view they take of any one of his numerous offices, and of the manner he fulfils that office, affords nourishment to their faith.

3. Believers feed on the whole *history* of Christ, as far as revealed in Scripture. Many histories are of considerable interest, and are read with delight and profit. But no history like that of the Saviour, recorded in the everlasting gospel. None so sublime and marvellous; none so infallibly certain and true; and none so interesting and beneficial to mankind. All other histories will die away with time, but this will be always recorded and studied with increasing delight, through the ages of an endless eternity. It will afford an everlasting feast to countless myriads, and continue always new and inexhaustible. You can fix your minds upon no

one thing in the whole history of the Saviour but will yield food and nourishment to believers.—Then *feed* your souls day by day on his mysterious incarnation, on his extraordinary life, on his intolerable sufferings, on his agonizing death, on his triumphant ascension to the throne of heaven, and on his all-prevailing intercession there; and this will afford you a feast which nothing else can furnish. Every *view* you have of God the Saviour will nourish your souls. Then view him as your atoning sacrifice, your way to God, your refuge and your rest. Live on him as the bread of heaven, the fountain of life, the foundation of your hope, and the rock of your salvation. The whole history of Christ, and every *particle* in it, is bread of life to the believing soul. And every one that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.

4. Believers feed their minds on the *salvation* of God. This is to be their delightful feast here and in eternity. It is, in every view you can take of it, a most extraordinary feast. Well may it be called “The *great* salvation,” seeing that it is the salvation of God, proceeding from his eternal love, flowing down in the blood of his beloved Son, and terminating in his everlasting praises. This is the great river that proceeds from under the throne of God and the Lamb; the streams whereof make glad the city of God. Believers drink of these waters, and live for ever. How justly is it called “*precious* salvation.” It is indeed precious in the esteem of God himself, and truly precious in the eyes of all believers; and very deservedly so, for it furnisheth them with all they need, and all they can

desire, to make them safe and happy here and for ever. They find in it mercy and peace, pardon and protection, life and triumph, grace and glory. This great and precious salvation is not for a limited period of time, and then to vanish away; but to *last always*. It is durable as the days of God, who saith, "My salvation shall be for ever." When the heavens and the earth are gone by, the salvation of God will still endure; and all the saints will be always feasting on it. Even here, in the way to heaven, they enjoy many a delightful *foretaste* of this eternal feast, by meditating on the salvation of God. They at times view the suitability and all-sufficiency of it, till they cry out, "We have longed for thy salvation." They look again and gaze on the preciousness and completeness of it, till they sing, "My heart rejoiceth in thy salvation." And when they behold the grace and duration of it, they break out in rapturous delight, and say, "My soul fainteth for thy salvation." So they feed their minds now on this feast while on their pilgrimage through the wilderness.

5. Believers feed their souls on the infinite *fulness* that is in Christ Jesus, "in whom all fulness dwells." There all the treasures and inheritance of the whole church of God are laid up, and from thence believers derive all their supply in time and for ever. "Out of his fulness we receive, and grace for grace." There they have enough, for God "hath committed all things into his hands." There they have variety and plenty, and they feast their souls, now on one thing, then on another.—At times they fix on his *redeeming love*, and

dwell on it with wonder and delight, till the love of Christ constraineth them “to love him who first loved them.”—They feed again on the *merits of his death*, and fix their minds on that wondrous cross, till they see a full atonement made for the sins of the whole world, and the door of mercy opened before a lost world.—They next nourish their faith by meditating on the *virtue of his blood*. And their joy is great when they see clearly, that “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin,” and that the saints “wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb,” and at last “appear without sin unto salvation.”—They feed on his *wondrous grace* in salvation. In seeing this, flowing like an eternal river, they are filled with courage and a blessed hope of a glorious immortality.—Another time they feed on the innumerable *spiritual blessings* which are in Christ Jesus. By seeing there far more than enough to supply the wants of his universal church through an endless duration, they triumph in Christ with joy and gratitude.—They feed also on the exceeding great and precious *promises* which God hath made them in Christ Jesus. These are to them like a thousand springs, which constantly flow from the eternal hills, and furnish them with the waters of life, to refresh their weary souls while travelling through the wilderness.—It would be endless to enumerate all the supplies they have in the Saviour’s fulness; for that fulness is an immensity that knows no bounds. On this the saints will feed and live through an endless duration.

6. The glorious gospel of the blessed God is the TABLE

on which this feast is set before us here in the wilderness. This *accounts* for the inestimable value which some set on the scriptures. It is the table where they partake of the bread of life, and drink of the water of life. And this accounts also for their frequent running to the book of God; it is the table where they eat their daily bread. The more they eat, the more they hunger; and the deeper they drink of the wells of salvation, the more intense their thirst after more.—Too many set but *little* value on the scriptures, and seldom visit them. The reason is evident, they have no hunger and thirst after Christ and his salvation; and where there is no hunger, there is no life: the living must have food and support. This table of the Lord is always *full*. Though myriads have been feasting there, yet the bread of life is not diminished, and the living waters never fail, but flow in Zion through all generations.—And the table that holds the bread of God is *open* for all; but thousands would rather starve than come. Having always lived on trash, they have no appetite for the true bread. Such is the case of all that are dead towards God. His children alone will partake of the gospel feast.

III. The BENEFITS of actual feeding on the gospel feast are truly great and lasting.—Many never taste the gospel bread. Some do; and the benefits they derive are immense and for ever.—Before we speak of the benefits, it must be first observed,

1. That the *act of feeding* on the bread of life is absolutely necessary. The very name given to the gospel provisions, plainly shews what use is to be made of them. The gospel salvation is repeatedly called a

feast, a banquet, and a marriage supper. The very end and use of such provisions is, that they be fed upon. Without this they are useless, and can answer no end whatever. It is utterly impossible that our souls can reap any saving benefits from the gospel provisions till we come to live by faith upon them. The best and greatest feast prepared for the body is useless till we eat of it. And so is the feast that God has prepared for the souls of men. Nothing can be more clear than that our souls must actually feed on it, or lose all the benefits of it. Hear the Lord's own declaration on the point; "I am the bread of life. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may *eat* thereof, and not die. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. He that eateth of this bread shall live for ever." John vi.

2. Many in a Christian land *never do feed* on the gospel feast. Great and marvellous as the provisions are; suitable and necessary as they are for sinners; yet by far the greater part never will taste of them.—Not a few, who frequently hear the gospel, continue so *ignorant*, that they have no idea that God hath provided such a feast as the gospel exhibits.—Some, out of *curiosity*, come and look at the gospel feast, *admire* the provisions, and perhaps profess that they are all for them, yet turn away, and never feed their souls upon them, but perish in their sins.—It is to be feared that

many only *play* with religion, and come to hear the gospel just as men go to a play-house, for entertainment, but have no intention to eat of the bread of God. — *Critical* hearers go with us over the gospel ground with the same kind of pleasure as if they were surveying a picture gallery; at times gratified with what they see and hear, but feed on nothing. — Many *light professors* go to hear the gospel as they go to a music meeting, for the mere gratification of the ear, and not as to a feast. The gospel sound is to them as sweet music and no more. They flock to hear it in the same state of mind as Ezekiel's hearers did, to whom the Lord said, "Lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song, of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not." Ezek. xxxiii. 32. — Not a few *careless* sinners refuse the feast which God hath provided; not feeling their *need* of it. They never knew that they were lost, therefore never wished for a Saviour. These come full to divine ordinances, and God sends them empty away. — The *self-righteous* quarrel with the gospel feast, on account of the *terms* on which it is offered to them, "without money and without price." Their pride will not allow them to accept of salvation but on the ground of their own merits, not knowing that they are wretched, poor, blind, and naked. These prefer perishing in poverty, rather than live on pension. They will not eat, and they shall not live. — Crowds of *worldly* men beg to be excused from coming to partake of the gospel supper which the Lord the Saviour hath provided. They have so much to do with their farms

and merchandize, their wives and earthly concerns, that they can spare no time to come and eat of the marriage supper of the Saviour of the world. Refusing to partake of the feast, is the same as refusing life eternal; for he that eateth not of this bread shall die in his sins.—All descriptions of *unbelievers* slight the gospel feast, and never taste of it. Though they may constantly appear in the courts of the Lord, and read the gospel where this spiritual feast is set before them, yet they never feed on the bread of life, and therefore perish everlastingly.—Some *pious* souls wish to eat, but are *afraid* to taste; ever saying, ‘It cannot be for me, I am too guilty and vile to be admitted as a guest.’ Such should inquire, ‘Are any too guilty to come to Christ for pardon? And are there any too vile to wash their robes in that fountain which is opened for sin and for uncleanness?’ Let these know, that “the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin,” and that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. If you are not something worse than sinners, you *may* come to Christ for salvation, and feed on the bread of life.—This statement is too true, that multitudes who call themselves Christians, *never partake* of the gospel feast. And it is as true, that without feeding by faith on the bread of heaven, they cannot be saved, but must perish in their sins.

3. The children of grace do actually and truly *feed* their souls on the bread of life. To them, the flesh of Christ “is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed.” The believing soul does as really feed on the words of eternal life, as his body does on its proper food. Wherever

there is life, there will be hungering and thirsting in that soul, which nothing can ever satisfy but eating of the living bread, and drinking of the wells of salvation. They that come to divine ordinances *hungering and thirsting* after Christ the Saviour, are the only people that partake of the heavenly feast, which God hath provided for his redeemed people. The more craving the hunger, the more they take. Every one will eat of the word of eternal life according to his appetite. The more intense the thirst of the soul, the deeper it drinks of the living waters. This accounts for the different manner men hear the same gospel. Some eat and drink abundantly, when others have not a crumb. "God satisfieth the hungry soul with good things; but the rich he sends empty away." They alone profit by divine ordinances, who feed their souls on the provisions of God's house. And the more they feed, the more they thrive in grace.

IV. Believers derive the greatest of all BENEFITS by feeding their souls on the gospel feast: Such as these,

1. Feeding on Christ brings the soul into *closer union* with him.—The very *life* and salvation of the soul depends on its *union* with the Saviour. Jesus saith to his disciples, "I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing," John xv. 5. We must be one with Christ and Christ with us: for he is our life, and we live by him. Separate from the vine, we are dead and withered branches, fit only for the fire: when united

unto Christ, we are made of one spirit with the Lord, and partakers of the divine life. “He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.”—We are made one with Christ by *faith* in his name. To be without faith, is to be without Christ, and without life. The unbeliever is dead in sin, and comes to life by believing in Christ, and being united unto him by faith:—As we exercise faith in the Saviour, we grow into *closer* union with him. The graft, as soon as it begins to derive nourishment from the stock on which it is grafted, begins to be one with that tree; the more nourishment it derives, the closer and stronger the union.—This, then, is the great benefit which believers find by acting faith on Christ; they grow into closer union with him: the more they feed on him, and the more they drink into his spirit, the more they are made one with him, and the closer the union.—The Lord wishes to have his people still *nearer* unto him; and for that end, “He feeds the flock of slaughter with the bread of affliction,” to make them feel their need of the bread of life. The main design of all the tribulations of the people of God is, to drive them nearer to Christ, and make them cleave more steadfastly unto the Lord. And what else is the main design of all holy ordinances, but to nourish the souls of believers, and so bring them into closer union with the Lord of life, that they may advance in happiness and meetness for heaven.

2. Another great benefit which believers enjoy by feeding on the gospel feast is, *communion* with Christ. This communion with the glorious Saviour, proceeds from our union with him, as the life, vigour, and

enjoyment of the members proceed from their union with the head. The souls that are not made one with Christ, can never have any fellowship with him, any more than the branch can be nourished by the vine before it is engrafted into it : but when we are united unto Christ, communion will take place, and grow as we act faith on him.—I speak not here of our communion of *interest* in Christ's righteousness and merits ; but of our communion of intimacy, and enjoyment in the Spirit. All believers have joint and equal interest in the *merits* of Christ and his salvation ; they are all justified by his one righteousness, and made free from condemnation ; they have the same title to the kingdom of salvation, and the same right to the tree of life and all its fruits :—but they have not all an equal degree of *spiritual communion* with the Saviour ; they have not the same nearness of heart, and enjoyment of Christ ; they differ in this, as they differ in their knowledge of Christ and faith in his name. They who feed most by faith on the Saviour, have the most enjoyment of his presence, and the greatest intimacy of spirit with him.—This is no small *benefit* of living on the gospel feast : it is the only way to have soul-communion with the Lord, which is heaven begun below. “ Feed on him in your hearts by faith with thanksgiving.”

3. Believers, also, by living on Christ by faith, are *transformed* into his image and likeness.—Every soul feeds upon something ; and yet can feed upon nothing but what must prove either injurious, or beneficial, to it. The soul turns into the *nature* of what it lives upon habitually.—If it constantly dwells on earthly things,

it becomes earthly: and if on heavenly things, it becomes heavenly. How is it that the miser's heart is formed, but by constantly employing his mind on things that are on the earth? And how is it that another man becomes spiritually minded, but by exercising his mind on spiritual things? A licentious man, by fixing his mind on licentious objects, becomes more carnal and vile. Let the subject of our chief delight and meditation be what it may, the soul is transformed into the same image and nature. How careful then should we be in the choice of subjects for our meditation, and employment of the mind. Let men look at *Christ* through faith, and dwell in their minds and affections on him, and they will be changed into the same image; and as they continue to feast their souls on him, they will go on from glory to glory. As they live on Christ, they are transformed into his likeness: as they drink into his spirit, they grow more in his image. Nothing in religion but holy commerce with Christ will make one like Christ: therefore they who feed most on him, will become most like him.

4. Another great benefit which believers derive from feeding on the gospel feast is, *growth in grace*.—Some Christians are of very slow growth, and some grow fast. Some make more progress in one year than others in ten. The case is plain, one eats abundantly, the other sparingly.—They who eat abundantly and habitually *grow up* in all things in Christ Jesus; they go from strength to strength till they appear before God in Sion. They grow in the knowledge of Christ Jesus, and faith in his name: they grow in humility

and self-denial ; in wisdom and strength ; in love and gratitude ; in spirituality and heavenly-mindedness :—they grow in every grace in proportion to their feeding on the bread from heaven.

Every *principle* that dwells in man, whether it be good or bad, grows by exercise and food. This is true of all the tempers, passions, and dispositions of the human mind : nourish them with indulgence and exercise, and they grow stronger in you.—This is true of what is *evil* ; such as selfishness, jealousy, envy, pride, anger, revenge, unbelief, worldliness, licentiousness, and such like. Indulge these, you feed the root, and they grow upon you.—This is true also of what is *naturally good* in man ; viz. good tempers and good natural dispositions ; such as kindness and affection ; compassion and sympathy ; gratitude and forgiving tempers ; and every other good temper. Indulge, practise, and exercise them, and they will grow in strength.—This is true also of all *divine principles* and fruits of the Spirit in the soul of man. The more you exercise and employ them in feeding on the gospel feast, the more they will be strengthened and established in your heart. Do we feel that we need growth in grace ? and do we earnestly long to grow up in Christ Jesus in all things ? Then let us take of the heavenly manna ; let us eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ. Without this, to grow in grace is a thing impossible. O then let us ‘ feed on him in our hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.’

5. It is by feeding their souls on the gospel feast that the children of grace have all their *spiritual*

enjoyments, and meetness for heaven. The children of God have joys *peculiar* to themselves, which the men of this world know nothing of. "Strangers intermeddle not with their joy:" their mirth is of a *spiritual* nature: "They joy in God:" "God my exceeding joy." It is "joy in the Holy Ghost;" and in Christ Jesus, "and in his salvation." At times it is "joy unspeakable and full of glory;" begun here below and carried on in heaven.—This joy proceeds from *faith* in Christ: it is "joy in believing." When believers have their faith in full exercise, "with joy they draw water out of the wells of salvation." When are we *happy*? when are our souls full of joy and gladness? when do we triumph in Christ Jesus, and are filled with the hope of glory; but when we feed by faith on the feast which God hath provided for us in his Son Jesus? And the more abundantly we eat and drink in his banqueting house, the more our enjoyment abounds in the Lord.—Let those Christians, who are *strangers* to this joy in God the Saviour, inquire, whether they feed their souls as they ought on the bread of God which came down from heaven, to give life unto the world? and they will soon find that they are negligent in this most essential point in religion, feeding by faith on Christ. Attend properly to this, and your joy in God will soon abound.

6. The great gospel feast cannot be *fully and perfectly enjoyed* but in ETERNITY.—Here below are many *hindrances* to the full enjoyment of Christ's salvation. Sin dwelleth in us; Satan tempts; the

world ensnares ; so that we cannot fully enjoy our inheritance, till all our enemies are finally conquered, and removed out of the way. In glory there will be *no hindrance* to our full enjoyment of the inheritance of the saints in light : impediments will have no existence there : sin, satan, the world, and the flesh will then be gone, never to return ; and death itself will be swallowed up of life, as the darkness of the night is swallowed up by the light of the rising sun.

In heaven alone is the gospel feast fully enjoyed ; and there it is *enjoyed to the uttermost*. The glory of it far surpasses man's understanding. " Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor can the heart of man conceive " what God hath provided for his saints in glory. Every thing contributes to heighten their happiness before the throne :—the *whole company* is come together : they were scattered among the nations, and through all ages ; but now they are assembled in the holy temple : the elect are gathered from the four winds ; not one believer is missing : it forms a company that can no more be numbered than the sand of the sea.—This general assembly and church of the first-born are now in the *most exalted* state, all pure and perfect ; " a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle ; all arrayed in white raiment, having washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb : all with palms in their hands and crowns on their head ; and all glorious within." Love divine pervades the whole assembly ; the peace of God fills every heart, till they overflow with joy unspeakable

and full of glory. It may then well be said, "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb," Rev. xix. 9.

What crowns all their joys and triumphs is, *Jesus dwells in the midst of the assembly*. What they always longed for was, "to be with Christ." They are now in his immediate presence, dwelling in his light, and in his love, and filled with his joy in glory everlasting. "They are now before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth upon the throne shall dwell among them," Rev. vii. 15. "And they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their forehead," Rev. xxii. 4. When the general assembly sit down with Christ in the kingdom of their Father, to partake of the marriage supper of the Lamb, their *joy and triumphs* are high as the throne of heaven, and durable as the days of God: for the glory given to Christ is now given to them also. They share with him as heir of all things. Great, then, must be their inheritance in heaven; and immense the felicity they enjoy in the city of God. If tasting here below that the Lord is gracious, makes our hearts overflow with joy; what must our rejoicing be, when we sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb, and drink of the rivers of his pleasures, in our Father's kingdom? See Psalm xxxvi. 8.

Eternity alone can tell what is the value of the inheritance of the saints in light. It is the duration of the enjoyment in heaven, that stamps such inestimable value upon it. Were the joys and triumphs of those that inherit the kingdom ever so exalted and great, yet if

they were ever to come to an end, this would lower their value infinitely. Were they to be dispossessed of their inheritance at some very *remote period*, though that period would not arrive for ten millions of ages, yet the very thought that such a period was ever to arrive, would greatly damp their joy, and lower the tone of their triumphs. For the more we possess, the more we dread to be turned out of possession. Such a dread will never be felt in Sion, for the inheritance of saints is “incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away.”—Those that are with Christ in glory feel *assured* that they shall be there through an endless eternity. And this assurance gives energy to their triumphs, and melody to their songs of praise. When they are in the height of their mirth and feel unspeakable joys; when their triumphs swell to the uttermost, they cry exulting, ‘This will *always last*, and never end. Our life is life eternal: our sun will never set: and these rivers of pleasures will flow for ever: and our hallelujahs shall be durable as eternity itself.’—Such is the Heaven where all the righteous go. Their felicity is both infinite and eternal. Who then but would seek salvation, cry aloud for mercy, and press into the kingdom?

XIV.—THE GREAT REJOICING.

Ver. 24.—*For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.*

THE most marvellous act of Jehovah, that we know of, is the salvation of sinners, through a divine Mediator. When all had sinned and come short of the glory of God; when all had taken up arms of rebellion against their Maker, and joined the standard of his grand adversary; it is indeed truly marvellous that God should ever think of receiving any of them into his favour and service any more. Much less could these rebels expect to be redeemed and restored to God through the *mediation* of his eternal Son. But “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John iii. 16.

In this *marvellous act of mercy*, God magnifieth his grace to the uttermost, confers the highest benefits on his creatures, makes the clearest manifestation of his own character, and secures all the glory to his own great name.—Had Jehovah *preserved* men and angels for ever in their pure and happy state of creation, this would have been an act of boundless benevolence: Yet even this would have been as nothing to the restoration of lost sinners to God, and to glory, through the mediation of a divine and bleeding Redeemer.—The eternal salvation of sinners through Jesus Christ,

is of all others the most marvellous act of Jehovah. It is here the river of life breaks forth, and flows down from under the throne of God and the Lamb into the regions of death and misery; it is here the treasures of his grace and the multitudes of his tender mercies are brought forth to the view of a ruined world; it is here we have the fullest proofs given us, that "God is love."

The Lord Jehovah, in his unsearchable providence, suffereth many of those that he will hereafter restore to himself and raise to eternal glory, to run into the *greatest length of sin and rebellion*, of guilt and misery. At one period of their lives, they are of all others the most unlikely to return to the service of God and go to glory. And yet we find in numberless instances, the degraded servants of sin changed by grace into the most devoted servants of God. Lions become lambs; rebellious enemies become obedient sons; they that were not a people are made the people of God; and they that were afar off are brought nigh by the blood of Jesus. A riotous prodigal is brought from the swine's trough to feast in his Father's house.

Herein God *magnifieth his grace* wonderfully, in saving many of the greatest, vilest sinners. "Where sin hath abounded, grace doth much more abound." This language, the self-righteous Pharisee cannot endure, and will charge us with saying, "Let us do evil, that good may come, whose damnation is just." Rom. iii. 8. It is known to all, that many of those that wander into a far country, return home to God. And when any of these wanderers do return, "there is great joy in heaven over every sinner that repenteth." This

joy is the subject which we have now to consider, and to inquire into the cause and nature of it. When the sinner returns home, and appears as a penitent at his Father's door, the Father saith, "Let us eat and be merry, for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."

I. "For this my son was DEAD."

First. This is God's own account of man under the Fall, that he is *dead*. This is true, not only of some notorious offenders, but of every child of Adam. *All* that have sinned are dead men. As soon as they have found sin, they have lost God, and when they departed from righteousness, they were brought under condemnation. Not one of all the posterity of Adam, whether Jew or Gentile, has continued in a state of life. "All died, for all have sinned." "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Rom. v. 12. Yes, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Rom. iii. 23.

You hear what God saith, that the sinner is DEAD. Not sickly, or in danger of dying, but that he is dead already. He no sooner sucked in the poison of sin than he died. When he fell from God, he lost his life and actually sunk in death.—Some of the disputers of this world, who choose to lean to their own understanding, rather than rest on the divine testimony, will tell you that the sinner is not quite dead. They confess that in the Fall he received much injury, but that his life was spared; that he fell about half way from God, but was not killed. They will tell you that the man

can walk still, though he goes limpingly.—This is a fundamental error in theology, and in its consequences leads to a denial of salvation by grace. God saith, the sinner is dead, and they answer, no, he is but half dead. They fall into this erroneous conclusion by observing many good qualities in man towards man. He can be kind, loving, and merciful; he can be compassionate, forgiving, and benevolent. These things indeed prove that man has a rational life, and that that life has many amiable qualities. And that is all it can prove.

But try what fallen man is *towards God*. He is dead. He has no spiritual life; no eyes to see the Lord, no heart to love him, no feet to walk in the ways of holiness, nor any hungering after the bread of heaven.—Dead souls give the most abundant proofs that they are dead in trespasses and sin. They are so *unfeeling* as not even to complain of the *weight* of their sins. Sin is so heavy that it sunk Pharaoh and his hosts in the sea. It sunk Sodom and Gomorrah, Korah and his company, into the bowels of the earth. It sinks all into the grave, and millions into an eternal hell. And yet sinners that have the greatest load of sin feel least of its weight: we need no further proof of their death. Lay rocks and mountains on the dead, and he feels nothing of them.—Sinners must be quite dead towards God, or they could never be so *unconcerned* about their everlasting state. Where their worldly interest is at stake, they are all alive. But they quietly suffer themselves to be deprived of the greatest things beyond the grave. They quietly lose the great salva-

tion, the kingdom of heaven, the river of life, and the eternal inheritance. Their unconcern about these things fully proves them dead.

How *tremendous the nature* of this “death which hath passed upon all men!” It is an entire separation of the heart from God. When sin entered, God forsook the soul. “Your sins have separated between you and your God.” We must *return* to God again, and dwell in him, and he in us, or this death will be an eternal death. The branch severed from the vine is dead, and shall be burnt. Sinners must return in heart to God, or continue dead for ever.

Let none plead their *inability* to return to God because they are dead in sin. For the very nature of your death is your guilt and depravity; your love of sin, and enmity against God. Surely none can think that this will excuse them. It is a poor plea indeed, to say, I love sin and hate holiness, therefore I cannot return to the living God; and yet sinners have no other plea to make. It will be in vain to say, ‘I *cannot* turn my hatred of God into love for his name;’ for what you cannot do the Lord stands ready to do for you, when you come to ask him. Let the sinner make a fair trial of God in this matter of life and death; let him search the Scriptures; let him believe what God saith to him: and let him ask in prayer for what God hath provided and promised to give to them that ask him; and the sinner shall find that God will deny him nothing that he asks in faith, in the name of *Jésus*.—Should you still say, ‘I have *no faith*, no praying heart, and no soul for religion;’ then ask God, for the sake of his

dear Son, freely to bestow these great and inestimable blessings upon you. It is in the use of the appointed means of grace, that Jehovah bestows all his blessings; and should you neglect the means of grace, you can expect no grace nor blessing; but, to be left in death for ever.—How did the *prodigal son* come from death to life? By thinking upon God, and calling upon his name; by seeking after God, and crying for mercy. So he came to life, and now his Father rejoiceth over him with exceeding great joy, saying, “Let us be merry.”

Secondly. “For this my son was dead, and is ALIVE again.”—Tender hearted parents greatly rejoice when they see their beloved children delivered in times of great danger from going down to the grave. How much more would they rejoice to see their departed friends, whom they loved as their own soul, rising from the dead, and coming to life again. With what feelings of unbounded joy did Mary and Martha look at their beloved brother, coming forth from the grave to live with them again! What transport of joy and gladness must that disconsolate widow have felt, who was following the dead corpse of her only son to the grave, when Jesus restored him to life, and said to her, “Thy son liveth!” They who mourn bitterly for the loss of dear relatives can enter deepest into these feelings. Were they to receive their departed friends back again, they would call their neighbours together, and say, ‘Rejoice with me, for this, my parent, my child, my husband, brother, or friend, was dead, and is alive again.’

Behold here, *Jehovah himself*, and all the hosts of heaven rejoice over a dead soul that is come to life.

The God of Israel saith, "Let us be merry, for this, my son, was dead, and is alive again."—It is on very few *occasions* in this fallen world, that the Lord rejoiceth, and this is one of them,—the resurrection of the soul from death to life; and on no other occasion does he summon heaven and earth to rejoice with him; which clearly shews that the quickening of a dead soul is an event of the greatest importance in the esteem of God. It means more than we calculate: it is big with consequences of the greatest magnitude. Coming to life here, is beginning to live for ever: it is passing from death to life, never to return. "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish," saith the Saviour. Jesus saith to every soul he quickeneth, Soul, live for ever. "Because I live, ye shall live also."—So the *occasion* of this "joy in heaven over every sinner that repenteth," is truly great and marvellous: no less than the birth of an heir of heaven, and co-heir with Christ.

Sinners *must rise* from death to life, or never see the kingdom of God. It may be said to all that now live to God, "You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." And it may be said to all that are dead to God, "Ye must be born again," or never enter into the kingdom of heaven. All that shall inherit eternal life must be created anew in Christ Jesus. The dead must either come to life, or continue without God; "for he is not a God of the dead, but God of the living." "Blessed are they that have part in the first resurrection."

Nothing is more *grossly mistaken* than the *nature* of the death of the soul; and from this error many

others arise. The ignorant think that the death of the soul is like the death of the body, when his breath is gone. No, the soul is always alive, and is only dead towards God. The death of the soul is its own moral depravity, the dominion of sin, and the want of holiness. This spiritual death consists chiefly in the darkness of the mind, the love of sin, and enmity against God. But so entire is the dominion of these evils over the human heart, that none but God the *Holy Ghost* can ever set the sinner free. The mind will remain in darkness, till the Holy Spirit shine into the heart, and give the soul to see the glory of Christ. The love of sin will reign in the heart, till the love of God is shed abroad in it by the Holy Ghost. The enmity of the sinner against God and holiness will govern his soul till the heart is renewed by grace.—How earnest then should we pray to God to give us his Spirit. “God giveth his Holy Spirit unto them that ask him.”

What sinners are quickened? “All that hear the voice of the Son of God.” “They that hear shall live.” They come to life by believing; in the very act of believing. As the blind received his sight in looking up, and the paralytic the use of his arm in the act of stretching it out, so does the soul receive life in the very act of believing in Christ. There is no life before faith, nor faith before life. As the Holy Ghost manifests the Saviour, and inclines the heart to receive him, the soul is quickened, and rises from death to life, as we act faith in the Son of God.

My son is alive, and gives *full proofs* of life. Till now he was like an idol which never moved from its

place; but now he moves, and walks in the holy ways of God. He comes home, seeks after God, and earnestly cries for mercy and pardon.—The *ears* that were once deaf are unstopped, and hear what the Lord God saith unto him. The *eyes* which were once blind, now see the glory of Christ, and look toward the holy land. The *tongue* which used to be employed in vanity, deceit, and falsehood, is now employed in speaking of Jesus's grace, and in setting forth the praises of God the Saviour. The *feet* which, till now, ran in the ways of sin, the flesh, and the world, now run in the ways of holiness, after Christ toward heaven. The *hands* which were employed in vile rebellion, are now washed, and lift up in the sanctuary, and labour in the vineyard of the Lord of hosts. The *knees* which once scorned to bow to God, and the *heart* which refused to pray, are now daily employed in imploring his pardoning mercy and his saving grace. Behold *all things* are become new; and this new man lives for God and eternity, and in so doing, gives abundant proofs of his being alive from the dead. So, 'my son that was dead, is alive again.' And this *resurrection* of the soul from death in sin, into life eternal in Christ, is matter of the greatest joy in heaven.

Thirdly. He was LOST.—This is the last thing that a ruined sinner will allow. He will believe any thing sooner than believe that he is *lost* and ruined. Tell him that he is a sinner, he will readily allow it, and perhaps will confess in words, that he is a great sinner. But if you tell him that he is *lost*, that he will deny, and believe nothing of it. He cannot conceive what he has done

to deserve a sentence of death, and especially of an eternal death.—But what saith the holy law? “*Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.*” Gal. iii. 10. No man has kept the law; all have sinned; then all are brought under the curse. And so long as they continue under the law, “the wrath of God abideth on them,” and the sentence of eternal death is passed upon them. So they are lost sinners, as condemned criminals, sentenced to die. Sinners must know and feel that they are lost, or they will never receive Christ, “who came to seek and to save them that are lost,” and none else. If you are not condemned and lost, he never came to save you.

The sinner is lost by his *father and his family*. He is no where to be found in the streets of Zion; nor walking in any of the holy ways of God; nor working in the vineyard of the Lord of hosts. If you go and search all the *assemblies* of the saints, who worship the Father in spirit and in truth, he is not there. Go through all the ranks of the *armies* of Israel who fight the battles of the Lord, he is not there. If you go through the land of life, and search every corner of the Redeemer's *kingdom*, he is no where to be found. He has wandered from his Father's house, and is gone into a *very far country*, to an immense distance from home, and there has lost his way in a wild and boundless wilderness, abounding with devouring lions, venomous serpents, and all beasts of prey. Such is his wicked conduct, forlorn situation, and hopeless state—He is *lost*.

The sinner in his unregenerate state is *lost to God*, lost to Christ, and lost to his church and kingdom. *God* has no service from him, no honour, no adoration, no praises. He is "the servant of corruption," therefore no servant of God. And God will accept of no service nor sacrifice that he can offer unto him, until he first offer himself.—Sinners without grace are lost to *Christ*. He has no love nor gratitude, no service nor honour from them. They do not gather with him, nor extend his kingdom, nor honour his name. No; in rejecting him, and neglecting his salvation, they grieve his Spirit, and provoke him to "swear in his wrath, that they shall not enter into his rest."—All unconverted sinners are lost to the *church* of God. They may indeed in some instances, like Hiram's servants, prepare materials for the building of the temple, but they never join the worshippers in spiritual adoration, and in rendering praises to the God of salvation. They neither labour in the gospel vineyard, nor assist in the holy war. They neither bring blessings down from heaven, nor send praises up to heaven. Then they are lost to the church of Christ, so long as they continue in their sinful and condemned state.

Fourthly. My son that was lost is FOUND.—Were we to consider this as the language of a pious and affectionate *earthly parent*, there is something very touching in it. Many years back his son left his house and wandered into some distant kingdom, and was never heard of afterwards, but had been long ago given up for dead. But, lo! unlooked for, he appears at his father's door, and appears there filled with contrition

and sorrow for his past misconduct. How would such a sight as this make the father's heart dance for joy, and make him exclaim with rapturous delight, 'My son, my son that was lost, is found; I had given him up for dead, but to my great joy, he is still alive. It is enough. My son is found!'

But here the *Father eternal* rejoiceth that a lost sinner is found; that a ruined soul is saved; that a wanderer is returned home to his God.—Had the sinner been left to himself, he *never* would have found his way back to his Father's kingdom, nor felt inclined to return; but would have wandered endlessly and eternally. The compassionate heavenly Shepherd pitied his lost condition and ruined state, went after him into the far country, sought him diligently, and found him in the wilderness, filthy and naked, and a companion of swine; Jesus washed him in his own blood, clothed him with white robes, and garments of salvation, and brought him home to his Father's kingdom.

When the wandering sinner is thus restored, he is then found in his *proper place*, and at his proper work. He is found in his Father's house, and at his Father's table, partaking with his family of the great gospel feast, and feeding on the bread of life. He is found among the faithful *labourers* in the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts, labouring for the meat that endureth to everlasting life. He is now found in the *Sanctuary*, joining the redeemed of the Lord in adoring and praising their great deliverer, and crying for pardon of sin and peace with heaven. He is often found in *solitude* filled with remorse in reviewing his former evil ways,

folly, and rebellion; and is filled with astonishment in viewing the long-suffering patience of the Lord, and his loving-kindness towards him. He is found clothed with heavenly *armour*, marching in the ranks of the soldiers of Christ, in the holy war. Yes, he is now found among the hosts of the Lord who have set their faces towards *Sion*, and are 'marching through Immanuel's land to fairer worlds on high.'—Whenever this change takes place; when a sinner is converted and restored to God, there is great joy in heaven, which will always last.

II. The occasion of this joy is TRULY GREAT, therefore the joy is universal, high, and eternal.

First; we shall inquire *who* they are that rejoice at the salvation of a lost sinner. ALL within God's universe, Satan and his subjects only excepted.—The *Eternal Father* greatly rejoices at the conversion of a sinner. "He joys over him with singing," and summons all within his vast dominions to rejoice with him. For in the salvation of a sinner, he sees his grace magnified, his Son exalted, and the sinner benefited. He foresees what this new born soul will live for ever; what felicity he will enjoy, how very high he will rise, and what praises he will render to his God and Father.—The *Lord Jesus Christ* greatly rejoices over every sinner that consents to accept of his salvation, and to return from sin to God. It was with this view he came into the world, "to seek and to save them that were lost." It was for this end he endured such intolerable sufferings, and died upon the cross, that he might save sinners. In every sinner that is saved, "He sees of the travail

of his soul and is satisfied."—The *Holy Ghost* also greatly rejoiceth. For every true convert is born of the Spirit, and becomes the child of his grace, and an heir of salvation. Well indeed, may the Holy Ghost rejoice over his new creation, for he breathes life into the soul that shall never see death, gives light that shall never be extinguished, and kindles a spark of love that shall expand into an eternal flame.—At the conversion of a sinner, joy inexpressible flows like lightning through the numberless ranks of the *holy angels*. The salvation of every sinner gives them a brighter view of the glory of God. They know more of him by every fresh stream of grace and mercy which flow from the fountain of life to ruined men on earth. And as they grow in the knowledge of their God, they ascend in glory and felicity. They learn by the church, or by what is doing in the church, "the manifold wisdom of God."—And we cannot even suppose that the *spirits of just men* made perfect in heaven are passed by, without having their share of this joy. They rejoice to find that the gospel which saved them, continues to prosper on the earth. It is high joy to them to see their glorious Saviour extending his dominion among the nations upon earth, and to see captive sinners released, and translated from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God. They look for assistance from these to swell the triumphs of eternity.—The *saints on earth* also in some measure partake of this joy. Next to his own salvation, the Christian's chief joy is to see others pressing into the kingdom, and laying hold on eternal life. Often has the pious parent's heart danced

for joy, to see his children walk in the truth. Converts to the Lord are the joy and rejoicing of the Christian minister's heart. And every Christian on earth, according to the measure of his love to Christ, must glory in the conversion of sinners.—And surely the *converted sinner himself* must partake of this general joy. When heaven and earth are filled with delight at the conversion of a sinner, it would be marvellous to see that sinner taking no share in the general rejoicing, or refusing to be comforted. Yet this is frequently the case while darkness and fears prevail. Bring this soul into the light of God's countenance, and fill him with the hope of glory, he will join the chorus, and rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.—So there is *universal* joy at the conversion of a sinner.

Secondly; this joy is GREAT AND LASTING. For great, very great, is the occasion of this joy in heaven. The eternal salvation of a lost sinner may appear a small thing in our eyes; but in God's esteem it is a very important event, or he would not call on the hosts of heaven to rejoice with him on this account.

Very *great things* take place at the conversion of a sinner. It is a day which will be had in everlasting remembrance; for in that day the soul is *united* unto Jesus Christ, ingrafted into the heavenly vine, is made one with Christ, and becomes the habitation of God through the Spirit. In that day a most wonderful *change* is produced in the soul:—he is created anew in Christ Jesus; death is here turned into life; darkness into light; and enmity into love: “all things become new.” At his conversion, he is brought into

a new and *exalted state* : he is brought from death into life ; from condemnation to salvation ; from Satan's empire into the kingdom of God's dear Son ; a child of wrath, is made a child of grace ; and an heir of hell, made an heir of heaven.

At conversion he is introduced into a new and most *dignified society*, and to the most happy station. "Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels ; to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven ; and to God the judge of all ; and to the spirits of just men made perfect ; and to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant ; and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." In the very day that the sinner comes to stand in this high relation to Christ and his church, he is constituted the *heir* of all things in the Redeemer's kingdom, "and co-heir with Christ." He now has a right to the tree of life, and to all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and to the glory that shall be hereafter in heaven. And this great inheritance is settled upon him, and secured to him by an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure.

At the conversion of a sinner to God, many and great things *begin which never shall have an end*. Here is the commencement of all things which shall endure for ever in glory ; such as peace with God, union with Christ, and communion with the Holy Trinity. Here begin the life, the light, and the love, which endure and increase for ever in heaven. Here

is the commencement of the eternal hallelujahs of the hosts above ; of the rivers of pleasures which flow for ever in Sion ; and all the triumphs of eternity. No wonder, then, that there should be such high rejoicings at the conversion of a sinner.

2. They rejoice because *so much evil is blotted out of God's creation*. Sin pollutes the earth, and is a heavy burden upon it, till it groans under it. There is evil enough in sin to curse the whole earth ; to fill heaven with anger ; and to ruin man through eternity. The creation would be greatly relieved by the removal of *one sin* ; but in the conversion of a sinner, multitudes of sins are taken away. " I have blotted out as a thick cloud, thy transgression, and as a cloud, thy sins," Isa. xlv. 22. This greatly relieves creation, appeases the anger of God, and makes way for his love to flow, and saves the soul from death : Great cause, indeed, for rejoicing.

This is not all. When the sinner is pardoned here in time, his sins for eternity are *prevented*. The sinner that never turns to the Lord, but dies unpardoned, goes on for ever multiplying his transgressions. Every sin in his nature, will produce countless millions more in eternity. The man will have spent but a very small portion of the duration of his existence, before he has himself sinned more against God, than all mankind have sinned on the earth from the fall of Adam to the end of time. What then will be the amount of his sins through an endless eternity ? To say a million of sins for every grain of dust in the whole earth is saying nothing, to what they will increase in number, in

a duration which knows no end. All these sins are prevented in the conversion of a sinner to God, and forms the ground of this great rejoicing in heaven.

3. They rejoice to see a sinner delivered from going down to the *pit of destruction*. We sometimes rejoice exceedingly in witnessing the narrow escape of persons in some perilous situation, from temporal death. What then must be the joy of the merciful God, and the children of his grace, in seeing a sinner delivered from eternal death and ruin ! The torments of hell, from their very *nature*, must be intolerable. It is enduring the wrath of God to the uttermost : it is a world of all evil, without any mixture of good : it is punishment, without one grain of comfort, or a gleam of hope. Were there *hopes* of release after millions of ages, it would abundantly lessen their agonies, and remove their dark despair. But there is no hope of release : “ It is a fire that never shall be quenched : ” “ And who can dwell with everlasting burnings ? ” The word eternity gives the deepest poignancy to all their woes : the word eternity breaks their hearts, and adds darkness to despair.

O then what a *favour* to be delivered from going to the pit, from whence there is no redemption ! What multitudes of tender mercies flow down in the conversion of a sinner ! What endless evils and unfathomable miseries are *prevented* by the forgiveness of sins ! Enough to furnish all heaven with endless joys and eternal triumphs. Let the *pardoned sinner* join in songs of praises ; for had he not been converted and forgiven, his torments would soon have been in-

tolerable: and in the course of ages, which he would have spent in hell, the amount of his sufferings and torments would have exceeded all that has been endured by all the miserable inhabitants of hell from the beginning till now. What inconceivable mercy then, to be saved from endless torments! And what wonder that all in heaven rejoice on such an occasion?

4. God and his heavenly hosts rejoice on account of the *happy state* into which every true convert is introduced. He is brought into a state of salvation; and his salvation is to be for ever. And who can conceive of the amount of happiness and glory, which one soul is to enjoy in the presence of God through all eternity! —When a converted soul finisheth his short pilgrimage on earth, he mounts up to the *heavens*; goes into Sion with everlasting joy on his head; and appears without sin before the throne. He is now arrayed in white, all glorious within, in the perfect likeness of Christ: a fit vessel to receive the joys of heaven, and a qualified priest to offer adoration before the throne of God and the Lamb. At his entrance into heaven in such a state, his happiness must be inconceivably great: for he *dwells* in the joy of his Lord; has an exceeding great and eternal weight of glory; wears the crown of life; and reigns with Christ on his throne: he has the most glorious *employment*; he drinks of the fountain of life, of the rivers of pleasures which flow at God's right hand for evermore, and sets forth the praises of him who redeemed him from death and

raised him to the throne of heaven : he is gone into Sion, to go no more out ; but “ to be for ever with the Lord.” In the day of his conversion the kingdom of heaven is settled upon him : “ If a son, then an heir of God.” Who then can wonder at the joy of Christ and his church at the conversion of a sinner ?

And who can ever tell the *amount* of the happiness which the pardoned sinner enjoys with God through an endless eternity ? The salvation of one soul is of far greater consequence than the welfare of empires through all time. What is eternal, can never be described. The felicity of a soul in glory only through millions or myriads of ages, will be immensely great ; yet no more to his eternal felicity, than the point of a pin is to the immensity of space. When a soul has continued in glory, till he has enjoyed more himself than all the *hosts of heaven* have enjoyed from the beginning of the creation till now, yet even that would be as nothing to what is still before him : yea, though he enjoy more himself, *millions and myriads* of times over, than all the saints and angels have hitherto enjoyed ; even that also would only be the commencement of his felicity and glory. Eternity is always before him : eternity is inscribed on all that he has ; on his mansion, inheritance, and salvation : eternity is stamped on his life, joy, and triumphs : eternity is engraven on his rivers of pleasures, unsearchable riches, and crown of glory :—and have not we every reason to believe that this felicity will be always *progressive*, always increasing. Oh then what immensity

of happiness falls to the lot of every saved sinner!—We shall no longer wonder that there is such joy in heaven at the conversion of a sinner.

5. The main ground of this joy is the *glory of Christ*. He receives more honour and glory from the conversion of one sinner, than from the creation of the heavens and the earth. It is here he lays out the riches of his grace, and lets his love flow like a river. It cost him more to convert and pardon one sinner, than to give life and being to all men and angels.—He created all things with the word of his power; but he must shed his own blood before he can bring a sinner to glory. The glory of Christ is the *crowning point* where all things finally terminate: and when the whole glory of the eternal salvation of all the saints shall be given to the Saviour, immensely great must that glory be. All that Jesus is doing in the salvation of sinners must finally terminate in his praises. Truly wonderful must that profound adoration be, which the redeemed of the Lord shall render in Sion to God their Saviour for ever and ever. They will be a company which no man can number: all as happy as God can make them, or that they can be, when dwelling in his love and joy and triumphs. All their felicity and glory they will convert into songs of praises, which they will pour for ever on the throne of the Lamb that was slain for them. Their united, melodious, and ceaseless hallelujahs and songs of triumph will *last* as long as the throne of God, through an eternal day. Every glorified spirit saith, “O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever,” and “will sing praises unto my

God while I have any being," It is said, "They began to be merry;" but it never will be said, They have left off their mirth and rejoicing: No, it will last always, and swell in melody as the ages of eternity roll along.

Verily, *no wonder* that there is such joy in heaven over every sinner that repenteth, for then another *child* is born of God, to be an *heir* of heaven, and companion of Christ in glory—another *monument* is erected to perpetuate the redeeming love of Jesus—another *vessel* of mercy is provided for the service of Jehovah in the eternal temple—another soul is *saved* for ever—and another *gem* is set in the Saviour's crown.

III. We conclude with these few REMARKS.

1. All the children of men have left God, and wandered into a far country; but all have not returned. Multitudes keep far from God, and *never will return* home.—Tremendous state, if you only consider what they *lose*! They lose the kingdom of God and his great salvation. They lose the exceeding great and eternal weight of glory, and all the rivers of pleasure which are at God's right hand in heaven. They lose all that heaven is, and that through all eternity.—More yet, there are intolerable *torments* which they must endure for ever, who refuse to return to God, but neglect his great salvation. They shall sink into an eternal night of darkness and despair, and suffer the wrath of God to the uttermost, without one gleam of hope of ever being released from prison.—And what do these *gain* by keeping far from God? Nothing more than the gratification of the flesh, and pleasures that die

away with the moment.—Strange *infatuation*! What dismal delusion! Great must be their unbelief, and strong their corruptions! They laugh at these things now, and make a mock of sin; but they shall weep where there will be no comforter.—They treat all *warnings* now, as the inhabitants of Sodom treated the warnings of Lot; but when the storms of vengeance fall they will be converted into believers, in a country where mercy cannot be found.—“Now is the *accepted* time, now is the day of salvation.” The door of life is open. Salvation is proclaimed. Return, “return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon you, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” Flee to Zoar, the storm is gathering. Hasten to the Ark, before the deluge comes! —

2. The ungodly have every *possible motive* to return to the Lord their God.—What inducement can you have to continue in the land of sin and death? Who would remain in a country where there is no bread, and where the sun will never shine?—You are under no further necessity of continuing in this land of dangers and of death, than what your own inclinations lay upon you. And surely there can be no great inducement to remain where none will dwell but condemned criminals and enemies of God.—Your release was purchased on the cross on Calvary. Liberty to the captives is now proclaimed by the everlasting gospel.

‘The year of Jubilee is come,
Return ye ransom’d sinners home.’

Assert your liberty; “Arise and come away.”

Set your faces towards Sion. Remember your Father's house, where there is bread enough and to spare.—The moment you begin the way home, a pardoning God will lay his anger by. The tender-hearted Father will run to meet you; will enfold you in the arms of his tenderest mercies; will weep over you with tears of parental affection and gladness; he will rejoice over you with unbounded joy and singing; and will call on all the millions of heaven to rejoice with him, saying, “Let us be merry, for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”

3. The kind reception and gracious indulgence which the returning prodigal met with at his Father's hands, afford the highest possible encouragement to all returning and *trembling penitents* to hope for mercy and pardon.—Why is this beautiful and affecting history retained on the divine records, but with the view of inspiring a lively hope in the desponding hearts of those who return unto the Lord their God, weeping, wailing, and trembling with fear? And what under heaven can ever afford such relief to the broken-hearted penitent, as viewing through faith the conduct of his heavenly Father towards his returning son? With what haste he runs to meet him! with what readiness he forgives him his past transgressions! with what tender affections he embraceth him in the arms of his love! and with what unbounded joy he receives him back into his house and family!—Such is thy God, O sinner, and such will be his conduct to-

wards you, when he shall find you weeping at his door, crying for mercy and longing for admission. Venture on his grace. —

4. Those *who are restored to God* must feel deeply interested in the history of this returning prodigal. —While you stand on *mount Sion* in Immanuel's land, look back to the far country where you once wandered on the dark mountains of ignorance and error. “Look to the rock from whence you are hewn, and the hole of the pit from whence ye were digged.” Look to the endless ruin which you have so narrowly escaped.—Then call to remembrance the multitude of *tender mercies* which interposed; and remember all the way which the hand of the Lord hath led you home; and never forget the kind reception which your heavenly Father hath given you, when you came weeping at his door. Meditate on these things till your hearts glow with gratitude to your God.—And now if you can look up to the *eternal hills*, and view the land of endless rest, the heaven of heavens, and say in faith and hope, ‘That is my home, and my inheritance;’ then ask, ‘What do I owe to the Saviour of my soul, and my deliverer, who hath done such great things for me? I owe him ten thousand talents, and yet have nothing to pay. He shall have all that I can give. He shall have my heart, my soul, my service, and songs of praises, while I have my being.’

5. Those that are converted are in duty bound to do all they can to *convert their brethren*, who are still wandering far from God. One grand end Christ had

in converting you was, that you might gather with him, and help to build his church. He said to Peter, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." So he saith to you that are brought home, 'Go and bring others home, that my house may be full.'—Are you by grace *delivered* from death, and *brought* to life eternal? Your debt to God is immense; feel your obligations; express your gratitude in labouring hard to save sinners from destruction, by leading them to Christ for salvation. If you love your Lord, and pity your perishing brethren, feel for them; counsel, instruct, exhort, warn, and invite them to return to the God they have forsaken. Employ all your skill, with earnest prayer, to win them to the Saviour. "He that winneth souls is wise."—Only be *faithful*, and *exemplify* in your own character the excellency and felicity of Christ's religion, and "your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord." Were you to win but one sinner to the Saviour, you have done more than to save a whole nation from temporal destruction. Remember, that "he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death." James v. 20.—Alas! numbers of *professing* Christians can look on their perishing brethren without making *one effort* to save them from going down to the pit. Nay, they will suffer their dearest relatives to continue in ignorance and without God in the world, rather than be faithful and diligent to win them to Christ. Such professors can know but little of Jesus and his salvation. They are trees that bear leaves and no fruit, and are nothing

more than cumberers of the ground.—Let the children of grace *abound* in the work of the Lord. Keep in constant mind, O sons of Sion, what favours God hath shewn you. “Freely ye have received, freely give.” Hear what your Lord and Saviour saith to you, “Ye are my witnesses,” my servants and messengers, “and if you do whatsoever I command you, ye are my friends and brethren.” Then go and “shine as lights of the world;” “publish salvation;” “adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things;” “serve your generation before you fall asleep;” and “be faithful even unto death,” that you may “by all means save some.” And for your encouragement to labour in the vineyard, remember, that they who turn many to righteousness, shall shine as some of the brightest stars in the firmament of their Father’s kingdom, for ever and ever.

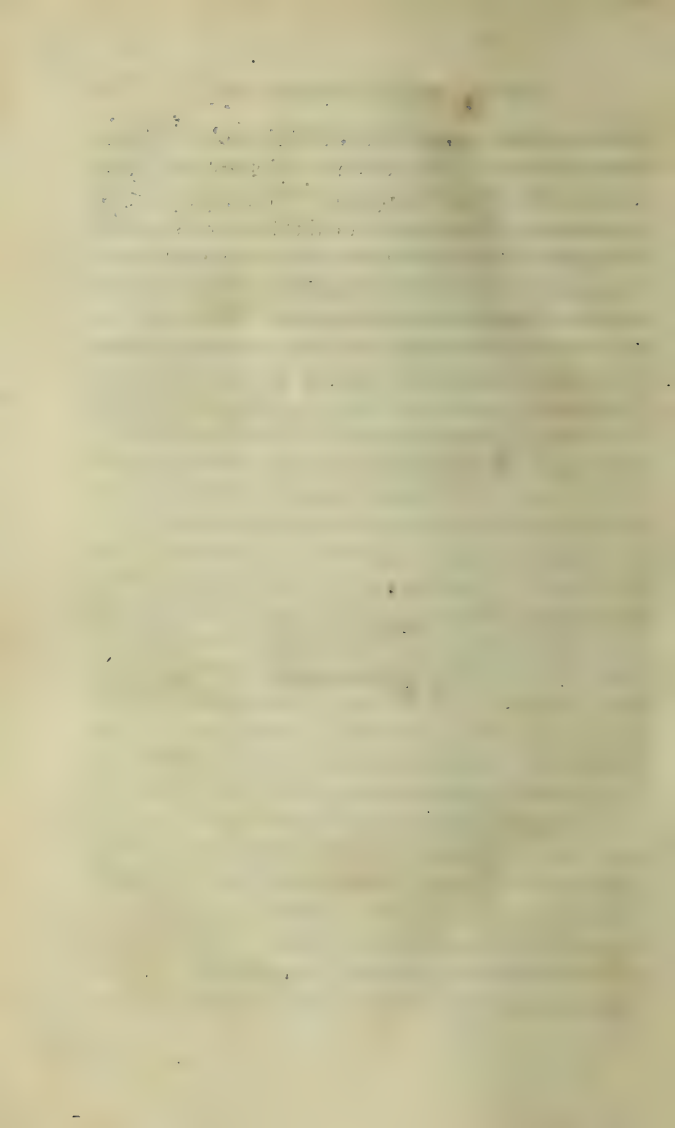
6. With what evil spirits are they possessed who *murmur*, with the elder brother, at the conversion of sinners!—By this elder brother, we may fairly understand all *self-righteous* professors, “who trust to themselves that they are righteous, and despise others:” who trust to themselves, and not to Christ, for righteousness.—These in their pride and blindness, lay claim to the inheritance of the saints, and call God their Father, and plead that they have never at any time transgressed his commandments. Therefore that they have a right, on the ground of their own merits, to all felicity and indulgence.—But when the Father saith to the elder brother, “Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine,” he addresseth him on the charac-

ter he assumes and the profession he makes, and not on the character he really bears. His loud murmurs at the free exercise of the grace of God in the salvation of his once profligate, but now repenting brother, prove the blindness, pride, and enmity of his heart against God's way of salvation and the freeness of his grace. —Men of the same envious spirit with the elder brother abound in every Christian land; and the more the gospel prevails in winning notorious sinners to the Saviour, the louder we shall hear the murmurs of these self-righteous men. These of all others have been in every age the firmest adversaries to the Redeemer's kingdom and salvation by grace.

7. Let those that are brought home, *keep at home*, and wander no more, but walk humbly with their God, and keep their journey's end in view. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have served sin. "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed, for the end of those things is death. But now, being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." Rom. vi. 21, 22. "Our old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." "How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?"—Let the children of grace *live in character*, and glorify their Father which is in heaven. Let them adorn the gospel of God in all things, and follow their Lord as dear children. Let them live a life of faith in the Son of God, and do all things in the name of the

Lord Jesus, and glorify him with their souls and bodies which are his.—Then, and not till then, they shall enter into the *blessed enjoyment* of the high privileges which belong exclusively to the heirs of salvation. They shall enjoy sweet communion with God, peace that passeth all understanding, lively hope of glory, and some foretaste of the joys to come, and which are to endure for ever in heaven. Soon shall every faithful soul arrive in glory, to be for ever with the Lord.

THE END









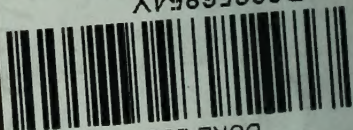
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